I Didn't Know It Could Be Like This

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I Didn't Know It Could Be Like This

by orphan_account

Summary

Will and Hannibal make their way to Hannibal's safe house in New Hampshire a couple days after their plunge off the cliff and plot their next move, Will coming to terms with the fact that he is committed to it this time.

Notes

So I wrote this very unexpectedly. I finished the series a little while ago and got pretty immersed in the fandom, devouring all the art and fic you immensely talented people have to offer! I woke up with images and phrases in my head last week, and I just started committing it to paper without thinking. I've been working on it ever since. Although I'm no stranger to writing, this is my first time writing fanfic, so be gentle. :) I'm beyond nervous about it. Hope you like it.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He was falling into the mouth of a great blue whale, only it didn't resemble any whale known to nature. It was much more grotesque, its skin covered in jagged growths that resembled the rocky, lichen covered cliff he had fallen off only a few short days ago, its mouth full of serrated teeth of various lengths and ferocity not signifying one particular type of animal. It looked like it could have been an invention of Randall Tier, Will thought, carved and crafted slowly and carefully to achieve maximum impact. The whale shrieked a piercing roar as Will tumbled into its mouth and down its immense pink tongue, a roar that sounded like everything and nothing all at once. Will woke with a start, sweat drenched and panting in a way that he hadn't in years. He looked over to see Hannibal, calm and collected as ever despite the circumstances. Did he ever feel anxiety the way normal people do? Will supposed that was impossible since "normal" was not a word one could use to describe Hannibal in any way, shape, or form.

"We're nearly there." Hannibal said, looking over at Will. If he was concerned by the sight of his sweaty form, his eyes betrayed nothing of the sort. His expression was mostly unreadable save for a note of sharp focus to the eyes. Will thought to himself that Hannibal was probably actually a fantastic person to have in a crisis, and then promptly snort laughed at the idea of a serial killer being the person he most trusted with his well-being in a crisis situation. What had his life become? Despite the fact that it had been happening gradually for years now and Will had mostly accepted it, there was still a nagging part of his brain that responded with disgust, shock, and rejection to it all.

Hannibal regarded him with a raised eyebrow, an ever so slight change in expression.

"Something amusing?"

"It's nothing." Will shook his head, turning to look out the window, taking in the beautiful scenery. Rows of pines with a pink and orange sunset peeking through the branches. The incongruity of it all seemed oddly appropriate. Beauty and pain. Hurt and comfort. Retreating to the beautiful part of nature after the brutality of it nearly killed them both, a poetic duality that had permeated their every interaction since the very beginning.

Hannibal regarded Will with curiosity for another few seconds but didn't open his mouth to inquire any further. Pulling onto a small dirt road tucked discreetly between a thickly forested area, Hannibal slowed down, the terrain becoming a bit rougher. The car swayed and rocked a bit on the uneven path, and after a few turns, Will began to see an upscale cabin in the distance. It almost resembled an upgraded version of his Wolf Trap house, a similar wrap around porch in the front, a chimney poking out of the roof near the back. But the exterior was made of gorgeous white pine, and Will was sure the interior held an elaborate kitchen and other elegant features catering to Hannibal's tastes, things that far surpassed the modest style of Will's former home.

Hannibal pulled in front of the house, and, taking the keys out of the ignition, turned to Will and nodded.

“Here we are.”

“Here we are.” Will croaked back, the words signifying much more than merely their arrival at Hannibal’s cabin (the thought that of course he had a secret house like this flickered quickly across Will’s mind; when had Hannibal been anything less than prepared for all outcomes?). Here they were indeed. All roads leading to where they were now, every fight, internal, physical, real or imagined, bringing them to something that felt final. Will still wasn’t entirely sure where *here* was, but he knew that they were there together. By choice and by fate. And for now, that was enough for his tired body and mind.

He followed Hannibal to the porch, leaning against the railing as Hannibal walked to the other end and ran his hand along the inside of the window frame, popping out a small section of it and retrieving a key from underneath it, snapping the hollow section neatly back into place. The section was fitted so tightly into the rest of the frame that the hairline break was barely noticeable even up close. It looked just like a small imperfection in the wood.

Will couldn’t stop a small chuckle from exiting his throat. Hannibal turned to him.

“Full of laughter today, aren’t we? I suppose that must signify a return to health.” He looked mildly annoyed, but his voice was tinged with relief at the sight of Will looking more well than he had since their deadly plunge.

“Sorry, it’s just…interesting to see the Hannibal Lecter equivalent of the omnipresent key in the potted plant behavior.”

Hannibal smirked and put the key in the lock.

“Perhaps I should run out and purchase a garish fake orchid for future use.”

“I see I’m not the only one regaining his capacity for snark.” Even as he said it, he felt the small exchange draining the energy from him. He was feeling better, but the pull of fatigue and injury was still there, weighting his limbs and eyelids down like so many buckets of lead. Will wasn’t sure how he could still feel so exhausted and weak when he had slept most of the way while Hannibal, who had driven for God knows how long while Will drifted in and out, was still upright, probably thinking through their (he made a mental note of how easily he replaced the singular with the plural) next move with calculated precision.

However, when Hannibal turned around and motioned for Will to follow him, he could see the exhaustion creeping into his eyes. It was a shift that might have gone unnoticed by someone who wasn’t aware of Hannibal’s subtle changes in expression, someone who hadn’t spent as much time studying them as Will had, but it was there. They slowly trudged up the staircase, which was L shaped and made from dark wood connected by a stark, modern, metal railing, gaps between each tread. It was beautifully constructed and just what he expected, but he kept feeling like he was going to lose his footing and slip beneath the slats like a toddler learning how to navigate their legs, his body growing heavier with every step.

By the time they reached the top of the stairs, Will silently taking note of the fact that they were now in the bedroom, he felt ready to collapse.

“Will, undoubtedly you wish to rest, but I think it would be wise to take a shower and properly clean your wounds before you do so.”

Will nodded slowly, dazed and not really registering the words as he heard them. Hannibal walked toward him, closing the distance between them and reaching for Will’s hand. Without a word, he led him to the bathroom; it was all luscious dark green marble and shiny chrome, a spacious clear glass shower against the far wall, the opposite of the dirt and discomfort of the past few days (how long had it been? Everything had passed by in such a haze, he couldn’t be sure). Hurt and comfort. Beauty and pain. Always. Hannibal turned around and started unbuttoning Will’s torn shirt. It struck Will how interesting it was that he was taking such care with a garment that was already useless and threatening to crumble. How interesting it was that Hannibal had always taken such care with Will, even when Hannibal himself was the cause (directly or indirectly) of the pain that had been inflicted. Images of Hannibal carefully washing his bloody knuckles after Will had pummeled them senselessly into Randall Tier flashed across his memory. Hannibal cradling his face when Will was training an unsteady gun on Clark Ingram, gently wrapping his hand around Will’s as he pried the gun from his grasp. Even as Hannibal sank the blade deep into the tender flesh of Will’s stomach that awful night many years ago, he held him the entire time.

Hannibal removed the bandage from Will’s chest wound and deposited it the trash can near the lavatory along with the bloody shirt. Even the trash can was rather ornate, green and wooden with a Florentine gilt design. Will would have made fun of him for it if he had the energy to do much more than stand there and let himself be disrobed like a child. He looked down at the stab wound, surprised at how quickly it was scabbing over. Deciding he wanted to preserve at least some sense of capability, when Hannibal reached into the shower to turn it on, Will started to take off the rest of his clothes unaided. He stopped at his underwear, not sure if he should continue. When Hannibal announced that he was going to go get Will some towels, he sighed with relief, glad to not have to unpack that whole confusing section of his feelings for the time being.

He finished undressing and stepped into the hot shower. At first, he didn’t even look for soap or shampoo, just stood under the warm spray, head tilted up to meet it gratefully, eyes closed in bliss, enjoying how comforting and gentle it was. He flashed back to the choppy, cold waves threatening to devour them and flood their lungs as they shakily navigated their way back to shore, gripping onto each other so tightly, moving together as one body. Fighting together. Fighting for each other. But fighting for what exactly? What *now*? What *next*? Will shook his head vigorously under the jets as if to physically push away the thoughts. He couldn’t process such heavy topics right now although they were doing their best to leak into his brain like so many expanding webs, spidery strands connecting strings of thoughts and having no regard for his current state. It wasn’t anything new. He always had trouble turning his brain off. Sleep was nearly always short, irregular, and fitful.

Will opened his eyes and just as he was about to look around for something to scrub away the grime and dried blood, he heard the shower door sliding open behind him. His breath hitched in anticipation, not sure if what he was feeling was fear, curiosity, excitement, or a mixture of

all of the above. Will stood perfectly still, trying to control the ever increasingly rapid rise and fall of his chest, not daring to turn around and meet Hannibal's gaze. Afraid it would bring back the flood of thoughts he was having such trouble ignoring. He heard a vague sound that he thought was the cap coming off a bottle and finally, languorously turned to look over his shoulder to see Hannibal lathering some gel between his hands. Looking Will straight in the eye, he began rubbing his hands on Will's back, gently but vigorously enough to get him clean. Will turned his head back around.

"You're washing me?"

"You're exhausted. You were standing here completely immobile." It was said so matter-of-factly, but Will decided to playfully push it anyway. Just to see what would happen.

"If that were any more thinly veiled, it'd be gossamer, Dr. Lecter."

"Tell me, how much more enervated does Will Graham need to be before his mouth catches up to his body and ceases for a little while?"

He could hear the smile in his voice, and it made Will smile right back. Hannibal moved his hands from Will's back to his arms, scrubbing in firm circles over the sore muscles. He brought his hands up the sides of Will's torso, returned to his back, and then, starting from the space between Will's neck and shoulders, began to make his way down his arms again. It was such a sure, firm yet careful touch. So mindful of his injuries and attentive, taking his time in a way that felt entirely too vulnerable and sweet. Like he was admiring him and memorizing every patch of his skin as he swept his fine, long fingers over it. Those deft fingers, so beautifully sculpted like a pianist's and yet capable of such destruction. Will had found himself watching those lovely hands as they painstakingly constructed elaborate dishes in the kitchen or committed a detailed sketch to paper. It was hard not to. Hannibal had an undeniably alluring grace about how he carried himself that, if he were to be honest (which he was finally starting to do in abundance these days), was something Will had always noticed and admired. Is this what it could be like? When they're on the same side, Will no longer fighting so hard against it? It now seemed so obviously inevitable that he could no longer call to mind what reasons he had for running away from it before, could only lament the fact that he had. Could only wistfully sigh, thinking about what could have been if he'd just listened to his instincts and left with Hannibal when he first wanted to. They could have been living a sumptuous life in Italy right now, Hannibal guiding him through the kind of culturally rich existence in Florence that only he could.

Will heard the sound of a bottle opening again, and he drifted away from his "what if" reverie.

"Tilt your head back for me, please."

Will obliged and Hannibal's hands landed in his unruly curls, the pads of his fingers beginning to massage his scalp. He involuntarily moaned at the soothing contact, leaning into the touch. It was so relaxing he briefly wondered if he would fall asleep standing up. Hannibal made his way up and down Will's scalp, pausing at the nape of his neck to rub the tightly knotted muscle, eliciting another involuntary moan from Will. Clasping his hand around Will's left bicep and pulling lightly, Hannibal turned Will's body around to face him.

Placing the tips of his fingers beneath Will's chin, he tipped his face toward the water to give his hair a rinse, reaching up to comb his fingers through the hair, wringing out the shampoo.

"I can do that." Will mumbled sleepily but made no move to replace Hannibal's hands with his own.

"Look at you. The child fervently insisting he is not tired even as he falls asleep on his mother's arm."

"You're not my mother."

"No. No, I certainly am not."

Hannibal reached for a bottle behind him and deposited more gel into his hands, the air filling with a fresh citrus scent, waking Will up a bit. He felt Hannibal's hands on his chest, cautiously running over his stab wound. Will flinched minutely.

"Sorry. I will not linger there any longer than is necessary."

Will nodded absently as Hannibal's hands continued down his torso, light, firm circles that felt so good. So comfortable. How could this feel so comfortable? It had no right to. He sharply inhaled as he felt Hannibal's hands dip lower, sliding across his hips, pausing to grip a moment before traveling down to the tops of his thighs, pointedly avoiding touching where Will surprisingly found he wanted and *needed* to be touched. But it really wasn't so surprising after all, Will thought. Why should it be after all this time? They had been so intimate in so many other ways, shared so much more than most people ever would. Why shouldn't they share this too?

Will whimpered as he felt Hannibal's hands leave his body, and he opened his eyes for the first time in what felt like hours even though it couldn't have been more than a few minutes. He felt his eyes soften with longing as he looked at that striking face, just like they did when Hannibal unveiled Abigail to him in his old kitchen. The night he made Will more acutely aware of both of their feelings for each other than he had ever been before. Or maybe he had. Maybe he just didn't want to admit it to himself. Hannibal gazed back with equally soft eyes, too tired to put on a mask at the moment. Or maybe he truly didn't *want* to put on a mask right now. Why would he bother? Everything was so clear now.

Not breaking the eye contact, Will reached behind Hannibal with the intent of retrieving the bottle so that he could wash him in return, but Hannibal caught Will by the wrist before he could. He saw Hannibal's throat bob as he swallowed hard and then turned his face to Will's palm and planted a soft kiss, closing his eyes and inhaling his scent reverently. Will loved that look on his face. It was like the mere familiar smell of Will was enough to intoxicate him into a blissful trance.

He felt himself moving without deciding to do so. His body was drawn to Hannibal, gravitationally pulled like it always had been. *It was always you.* The words hovered in Will's mind as he reached his free hand to place it on the back of Hannibal's neck, pulling down until their foreheads were leaning against each other. He could feel the other man's breath on his face, hot and coming faster every second. Closing his eyes, Will tilted his face forward

until their lips met, tentative and feather light, part of him still unsure if this was okay. Hannibal released Will's wrist and brought his hand up to cup Will's cheek, pulling him back into the kiss, harder this time, melting away his doubts. It grew more ardent, lips parting to allow tongues to hungrily explore each other. Will could hear himself moaning into Hannibal's mouth. It felt like the exquisite release of so much tension. *Years* of it. They gripped each other tighter, arms winding around backs and shoulders, mindful of injury but embracing as close as it would allow. Will's fingers found Hannibal's hair and tugged a little, holding it at the root. He wanted more. He wanted to shove him against the back of the shower and grind into him helplessly like a teenager. He wanted to bite and kiss his way down Hannibal's body, savoring every taste and smell, but as hungry for him as he was, the pull of exhaustion was still threatening to take him under like a river rapid, and he felt his knees buckle. He stumbled backward a bit, Hannibal quickly bringing his hands to either side of his waist to steady him.

"You need to rest, Will."

"But…we've wasted so much time already. We've waited so long." The last few words came out like a defeated whimper, so quiet that Will wasn't even sure Hannibal had heard them. He hadn't meant to say it, didn't even realize how true it was until the words left his lips. He felt like perhaps he should want to take it back, but he didn't. Not at all.

"I know." The response was genuine and sweet, Hannibal stroking the side of Will's face and looking into his eyes.

"Get into bed, please. I'll be out momentarily. There should be some gauze behind the mirror. Wrap your chest lightly after you dry off. Now that it's healing, you'll want to avoid trapping too much moisture." He pressed one last kiss to Will's temple.

Nodding briefly, Will opened the shower door and stepped out. He grabbed one of the large, fluffy towels Hannibal had laid out for him, a dark green that matched the bathroom, and dried off his body before wrapping the gauze around his injury. He turned to look back before exiting the room, admiring the curves and angles of Hannibal's body, wondering how it could be possible that he was a living, breathing human walking among us and not some expertly carved marble statue. Smiling, he walked into the bedroom and dove under the covers, thankful for the incredibly soft, enveloping sheets. It was such a simple yet overwhelming relief to tumble into bed.

Just as he was about to drift off, he heard the shower stop. His breathe caught in his chest for a second. Hannibal would be joining him in a minute. While they had already slept clinging to each other once before, squeezing together for warmth on a brutal beach wasn't really the same as what was about to happen now, and the thought made Will's heart beat faster. He heard the sound of feet padding toward him, and then he was there, peeling back the covers on the opposite side, climbing into bed still naked.

"Assuming a lot, aren't we?"

Hannibal raised an eyebrow in amusement.

"You would kiss me and then turn me away from my own bed? How utterly cruel."

A lazy smirk spread across Will's lips.

"Of course not. Never."

Hannibal turned to face him and reached out to stroke his cheekbone.

"Good night, dear Will."

He reached over to pull the chain of the bedside table lamp and settled on his back. Will crept toward him and placed his arm over his chest, his head resting in the crook of Hannibal's arm. Hannibal shifted his arm out from under Will and put it around his shoulders, angling Will's head to rest more comfortably on his chest. They nestled and shifted, Hannibal's other arm finding its way around Will, his chin moving to rest on top of his head. They locked into place like this was something they had been doing every night for years. Will was asleep within seconds.

He was back in the mouth of the whale except that he wasn't really. He was hovering above it, falling in slow motion, falling off the cliff with the whale's great voracious mouth open and ready to devour him at the bottom. It felt like he would never reach it. Like he would be stuck in midair, forever suspended in fear for all eternity, never able to feel the release of finally meeting his bloody fate, the piercing roar of the creature threatening to burst his ear drums.

And then suddenly, the whale was gone. He was back on that beach with Hannibal, waking up feverish and weak, hearing Hannibal calling his name, asking him to stay with him, asking him if he could walk. The picture blinked in and out like memories coming back to an amnesiac in stuttering, incomplete slides. Breaking into that house in the woods. Dressing wounds and washing extremities, taking care not to leave too much evidence that they'd been there. The burn of alcohol on open wounds, the white hot pain flaring and threatening to pull Will under. Hannibal stitching the gashes in Will's cheek and chest as he faded in and out of consciousness. Hannibal grabbing supplies from the medicine cabinet and then turning to Will with concern. Holding his face and demanding that Will look at him, respond to his questions. Waking up in a car pulled over into a wooded area and covered purposefully in underbrush, Hannibal asleep in the driver's seat. Vaguely hearing Hannibal tell him about his house in New Hampshire. Will asking for water and greedily gulping it down when presented.

Will jolted awake, gasping for breath, sweaty and disoriented, forgetting where he was for a moment. He sat upright and looked around, and it all came flooding back. He settled back down with a sigh, catching his breath and noticing that Hannibal was not in bed with him anymore. Will looked over at the side of the bed where he had been and found only a neatly folded set of dark navy pajamas and a pair of boxers in the same color. As he buttoned the

pajama top, he chuckled to himself, wondering when he had last, if ever, worn anything of this quality to bed. He was usually just in a plain t shirt and boxers regardless of the weather.

Will contemplated lying back down but then his ears perked at the sound of clanking pans and something sizzling in a skillet downstairs. His stomach growled. When was the last time he had eaten? He couldn't remember. Descending the stairs, he looked at the interior of the cabin, fully appreciating how gorgeous it was in the daylight and with a clearer, well rested head. There was an ornate stone fireplace in the living room, a lush, chocolate brown U shaped sectional sofa, and the ceilings were elegantly high. He could imagine himself falling asleep reading a book on that sofa, a fire going strong, a dog curled at his feet. He felt a pang of regret thinking about Winston and the rest of his beloved stray family. Following the sounds and smells of breakfast, Will took a left at the bottom of the stairs and found Hannibal in the kitchen, robed and tending to what looked like eggs and sausage on the stove.

"Good morning, Will." He turned to greet him with a half-smile.

"Morning." Will had the urge to come up behind him and wrap his arms around his waist, nuzzling his chin into Hannibal's neck, but it felt entirely too cozy and domestic. Like trying to pet a tiger in the wild. He laughed at the image. Hannibal his beaproned housewife making him meals.

Hannibal regarded him with a curious smile.

"You know," he said, dividing the contents of the skillets between two plates and turning around to deposit them on two opposing stools on the kitchen island behind him, "I should very much like for you to reveal the sources of these sudden bursts of laughter to me some time. Share with the class, as they say."

Will shook his head. "I can't…it's too embarrassing." He said as he took a seat in front of one of the plates.

Hannibal sat down as well and tilted his head in that deeply unsettling way he had, as though he was regarding a specimen, a scientist observing the behavior of a rat in his lab instead of a human being looking at another fellow human. It was chilling. *I was curious to see what would happen.* The words of the past echoed in Will's mind. Wind us up and watch us go. A god's large, high stakes chess game. Will absurdly remembered the moment in the second Halloween film where Michael Myers tilted his head after Jamie Lee Curtis called his name in an attempt to knock him off balance in his pursuit. The ridiculousness of associating the two images almost made Will laugh again, but he bit down on his lip just in time to quell it.

"Hmm. I cannot help but wonder what could be so discomfiting to you that you could not share it with me. After all this time."

You. Always you. You terrify me and yet it excites me and I never want it to stop and I hope you want that too. God, I'm so fucking fucked up. Will's internal monologue ran wild for a minute and then he thought, what the hell? How could this possibly be scary after everything else? What was there left to fear, especially now that they were finally playing the game on equal footing, all cards on the table so to speak. His becoming finally fully realized. Will took a deep breath.

“When I saw you at the stove, I…wanted to come up behind you and put my arms around you.” He cautiously looked up. Hannibal was placid as ever.

“And yet you did not.” Not a question. Just a statement.

“No.”

“Why not?”

Will let out a frustrated huff as if it should be obvious, and he shouldn’t have to explain it.

“Because…” even though he thought it was obvious, he found himself faltering and in lieu of an explanation, settled on “would you have wanted me to?”

Hannibal smirked at that. It was a very “oh you poor naïve little boy” expression that made Will a little annoyed.

“I think,” Hannibal said, taking a bite of his food and chewing for a moment, “if you have to ask such a question, you’re still not being entirely honest with yourself.”

“Jesus.” Will leaned back on the stool, exasperated.

“I do not believe he is anywhere to be found at the moment. You will have to make do with only me.” Hannibal continued to look amused and rose to attend to the coffee siphon on the counter, pouring them both a hearty cup. He set both cups down, “You know, it is interesting that you seemed to have had much more clarity on this matter when you were in what some might argue to be a less lucid state, influenced by both mental and physical fatigue.”

Will speared a piece of sausage, hesitating to bring it to his mouth.

“It’s pork.” Hannibal said, reading his mind.

“How did you…”

“Both meat and eggs freeze very well, Will.”

“Yeah, but you’d still have to…you know what, never mind. It doesn’t matter.” He took a hefty bite and chewed thoughtfully. “One might also argue that my less lucid state was just that, a moment completely lacking clarity.”

Hannibal considered this and responded, as ready as ever with a rebuttal.

“Will, ignoring your instincts in favor of fighting against them with overwrought mental gymnastics corresponding to perceived morals and restrictions that you have built up in your mind over the years to satisfy some sort of idealized character of what those around you believe to be a good, upstanding person has been a constant struggle for you. And not one for which you are entirely to blame. Naturally, you sought to function as undisturbed as possible in society among your fellow man and naturally they, in turn, reinforced such ideas continually and with ferocity, forcing you to turn against your true nature time and time again. However, you have come so far in discarding all of that. Our battle with the Great Red

Dragon and our subsequent plunge into the sea and triumphant reemergence serves as both a very real and symbolic rebirth for you. While I understand that progress is certainly never a straight line, I would hate to think that after all the fires you have walked through, something so small as wanting to dole out affections toward another man would be the thing to cause you question."

Will ate another bite from his plate, silently cursing Hannibal's ability to turn everything into a philosophical discourse. He both loved and despised it. It elevated everything and gave Will a challenge, a match of wits he never experienced with anyone else, and yet it also made him tired and wishing for some conversations to just be *simple*. But he knew this wasn't simple. Not even close. The nature of the discourse here was completely appropriate.

"It's not because it's another man." Will said decisively, taking a sip of coffee.

"No, I suppose not. It's because it's me."

"Yes." Will squarely met his gaze across the island.

"And what was different last night?"

"This…here," Will gestured between the two place settings, "It's so domestic and…well, *normal."*

"And showering together isn't both domestic and normal? Sleeping in the same bed at the end of the day?"

"Not when it takes place after a journey back from an intuitively coordinated murder and subsequent plunge into the sea and triumphant reemergence as you put it, no. It's not."

"Is our version of domesticity not permitted to diverge from that of *normal* people since our circumstances are naturally askew from that path? Would not everything else, the everyday activities for example, be slightly askew in accordance with our more…atypical activities? That is to say, are we not permitted to have quiet moments of peace that are not so dissimilar to the lives of others? Do you think our life would only ever be fraught with peril and adrenaline simply because of the darker parts of ourselves?"

"Are we having a warped version of the average person's 'what are we' conversation?"

"Perhaps. Would you like to?"

"Yes…no…I don't know. I just woke up."

Hannibal nodded sympathetically.

"That is understandable. We have both been through quite the ordeal. There is much to unpack, but it can wait until you are feeling stronger."

Will watched Hannibal swirling a teaspoon of sugar into his coffee and felt so much all at once. Love and anxiety and comfort and disquiet.

“I didn’t know it could be like this.” He said barely above a whisper.

Hannibal snapped his head up to meet Will’s shy gaze. He reached across the island and placed his hand over Will’s.

“It can be so much more than you ever imagined, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

So that's chapter 1! I'm not sure how long this will go on, and I don't fully know where I intend it to go. I have several pages after this point so I'm just going to keep going and see where it takes me for now. It probably won't be long until I put chapter 2 up since I'm already partway through it. I'm having a lot of fun writing it which I guess is the most important thing.

I hope starting a few days post cliff incident didn't seem lazy. It was just how it formed in my mind for some reason, with Will remembering bits and pieces in dreams and flashes since he was out of it most of the time with Hannibal taking the reigns as far as caring for them on the journey. Feedback is greatly appreciated, Fannibals. :) I will be adding more tags as I go along.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Our boys have things to talk over and figure out, and Hannibal is patient with Will as he wrestles with everything. Mildly smutty in the beginning but we're still slow burning (medium burning? I feel like it's a medium-ish burn maybe?) here so not very much yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They spent the day quietly recuperating. There was a lake not too far from the house that could be seen from the back porch, and they both sat in cushioned wooden chairs admiring the sun glinting off the water, Hannibal reading some weighty Italian tome and Will just sitting peacefully, his more intense thoughts finally leaving him be for a couple hours. Hannibal had provided him with a sweater and pants that, while definitely dressier than Will's taste (he was sure Hannibal had never owned a pair of jeans in his life), were comfortable. Hannibal himself was clothed in slacks and a button down, his version of casual although it was probably all still bespoke. Will absently thought that he should like to see him back in one of his exquisite albeit pretentious three piece suits. As the sun set, the temperature started to drop and they headed inside.

Hannibal put some logs in the fireplace and poured himself a glass of wine from a bottle on a small rack in the kitchen.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"Bourbon, if you have it."

Hannibal opened a tall wooden cabinet in a corner of the living room to reveal a fully stocked bar complete with decanters, crystal tumblers, bar spoons, and everything else F. Scott Fitzgerald would need to entertain guests. This made Will smile. Of course he had a setup like this even in his safe house. Of course he did. Hannibal selected a tumbler and, opening a decanter filled with amber liquid, poured a few ounces and handed it to Will.

"Thanks."

Will settled onto the sofa with his drink. God, this was nice. In spite of everything there was to sort out, he couldn't help feeling a sense of tranquility washing over him. The setting was pretty idyllic and very much a place Will could see himself living. Even though it hadn't been discussed yet, he was sure they would have to move on soon. He tried to ignore that and enjoy the time here.

Hannibal settled in on the opposite side, back resting in the corner of the couch. He sipped his wine slowly, head leaning back languidly to rest on the cushions. He looked comfortable and calm. Will felt like it was a perfect moment to reach out and touch him, but he didn't.

Jesus, a roaring fire in a cabin in the wilderness? What more did he need? A goddamn neon runway? He petulantly thought. The situation was practically gift-wrapped. Why was he still resistant? He looked over at him, his face serene, eyes shut, wine in hand. It was how he deserved to be, Will realized. He had missed seeing him free like this. He didn't belong in a cage like an animal. The thought of him in captivity, being broken like a wild horse, left a stinging tightness in Will's chest. Will's eyes traced the angles of his jawline and cheekbones, the curve of his lips, remembering those lips on his last night, slick and warm and soft. He felt his cock stirring in his pants, alarmed at how just the sight of Hannibal and the ghost sensory memory of his lips was enough to make him half hard. He wondered what Hannibal was thinking, if he was strolling around an elaborate wing of his memory palace at the moment, if he was thinking about Will.

And just like that, frighteningly sudden, the questioning worry faded and Will found himself magnetically drawn to Hannibal once again. He had a slight sensation of standing outside of himself and watching his actions from afar; it wasn't dissociative, more a sense of acting automatically, his body moving forward before his mind could catch up. He set his tumbler down on the glass coffee table and slid toward him. Hannibal opened his eyes and Will reached for his wine glass, plucking it from his grasp and setting it down on the table. Hannibal said nothing, merely regarded him with curiosity. Will licked his lips, his eyes moving from Hannibal's mouth to look him in the eyes, a pleading expression on his face.

"If you want something, you only have to ask."

"Can I…can I kiss you again?"

Hannibal reached out a hand to stroke Will's right cheek, careful to avoid his stitches.

"Now that is something you needn't ever have to ask for, Will." He smiled a genuine, warm smile, and Will returned it, his nerves melting away somewhat.

They leaned in together, Will half reclining on Hannibal, and Hannibal sitting up to meet him. Will could hear his own pulse beating like timpani, throbbing low and deep in his ear, drowning out all other sounds. When he swallowed, the saliva caught in his throat and gathered into a lump, his tongue thick and hot in his mouth. It felt like he was approaching Hannibal in slow motion, an eternity to close the short distance between them. When their lips met, it was slow and passionate, every stroke of tongue against tongue feeling like a thousand sparks behind Will's eyes. He couldn't remember the last time a kiss had made him feel this much, every nerve in his skin on fire. He moaned and Hannibal made a low groan in response that went straight to the heat in Will's belly, igniting him in a wave of pleasure all over again. He was fully hard now, the strain against his pants beginning to ache, begging for attention. He wondered if Hannibal could feel it against his thigh. Their hands roamed each other freely, gripping hair, shoulders, cheeks, Will digging his nails into Hannibal's back through his shirt. They broke for air, and Will relished the look of lust in Hannibal's usually composed face. He studied it, tried to commit it to memory. Never taking his eyes off him, Hannibal grabbed the bottom of Will's sweater and lifted it up, Will complying and lifting his arms so Hannibal could take it off all the way. Will panted, suddenly aware of being exposed and aware of where this was going. So this was really going to happen. He gulped, his throat

abruptly drying up, and moved a shaky hand to rest on the top button of Hannibal's shirt. Seeing his hesitation, Hannibal placed a gentle hand over Will's.

"Do not force yourself to do anything you don't feel ready to do."

Will gathered his courage and looked at Hannibal.

"I want to. I do." *I can't NOT do this anymore.*

Will felt his eyes watering slightly, swayed by the emotion of the situation. All roads leading here, to where they were now. How could he turn away from any part of that anymore?

Hannibal leaned up to kiss him, and Will began to unbutton his shirt, feeling more sure of himself with every undone button. When he finished, he put his palms on Hannibal's chest, just below his collarbone, massaging in circles like Hannibal had done to him the night before, moving down his torso to his stomach, enjoying the way the taut muscles felt under his hands, a reminder of his strength and beauty, a perfect predator.

Hannibal dropped his shirt to the ground and roughly pushed Will forward and onto his back in one swift movement, his hands landing on either side of Will's face. He planted a rough kiss on his lips and then made his way to Will's neck, licking in small, quick laps that made Will moan, his head lolling back, neck stretching and begging for more contact. When Hannibal bit down on the flesh between his shoulder and neck, Will practically yelped, hands tightening around Hannibal's back. Hannibal kissed and licked the tender spot before biting down again, sucking hard this time. Will cried out again, nails digging into Hannibal. He could feel his face getting flushed and starting to sweat, almost painfully aroused, the sensitivity heightened on every inch of skin.

Pulling back, Hannibal looked at Will, basking in the lust he saw in those half-lidded eyes, his ever reddening face.

"Look at you. You are so beautiful like this. So aroused from so little, I bet in a few minutes you'll have discarded all shyness and be begging me for what you want. Won't you?"

You know I will. He didn't dare say it, still far too self-conscious, but he knew Hannibal knew it was true.

"What should I do to you next? You won't tell me what you want yet, will you? But you will be pliant as ever, won't you? I wonder what you would say no to."

"God, your – " Will stopped short of finishing the sentence.

"Tell me." Hannibal murmured low and commanding in his ear, licking and biting his earlobe, a gasp erupting from Will's throat.

"Your voice…it's so deep and hypnotizing…it's…ugh…it's just really sexy, ok? Christ, I feel like I'm fifteen years old." He shielded his eyes with his forearm, overcome with embarrassment once again. How long would he oscillate between acceptance and embarrassment? It was feeling a bit torturous and yet irresistible.

“So diffident, so afraid of what you want. Why should this be the last thing you refuse to stop denying yourself?”

Will rolled his eyes and bucked his hips against Hannibal’s.

“Does that feel like I’m denying myself anything? Maybe I just don’t want to endlessly *talk* about it.” A flash of anger colored his eyes as he remembered how frustrating it was to have Hannibal do this at the wrong time, wishing he would just shut up right now. Hannibal smiled evilly at his defiance.

“But you will talk about it because I want you to, and you want to please me, don’t you?”

“So as usual, it’s about what you want above all else.”

“On the contrary. As usual, I know you better than you know yourself, and I know,” Hannibal started kissing his way down Will’s neck, collarbone, chest, flicking his tongue over a nipple and tugging lightly with his teeth, “that you will like submitting as much as I will relish watching you submit.”

Will felt his face turn from pink to deep scarlet, unsure what percentage of it was arousal and what was mortification, but one hundred percent sure that Hannibal was absolutely correct. The thought vaguely pissed him off. He was sure Hannibal was feeling very smug and self-satisfied about how easily he could read Will. Hannibal’s lips kept moving down, brushing over the scar he gave him, a mark of ownership, a memento Will would always have of their shared splendor and horror, before passing over his left hip bone to deliver a shudder inducing bite. He was so tantalizingly close to where Will desperately wanted him, but he stopped and Will whined at the absence of Hannibal’s mouth. He rose to a kneeling position between Will’s legs. God, he looked so formidable and alluring. Will wanted him so badly and yet felt frozen, pinned down by his reservations, his inexperience, his lack of confidence. He didn’t feel like a match for Hannibal in this arena.

“If you want something, you only have to ask.” Hannibal repeated, watching Will with a piercing gaze that made him squirm.

“I…I can’t.” Will turned his head away, focusing on the orange and yellow flames flicking over the logs in the fireplace.

Hannibal gently clasped Will’s chin between his thumb and forefinger, turning his face back to look at him.

“Yes, you can.”

Will felt himself shrink under the eye contact, any residual boldness retracting. It was as if a switch had been flipped. He was sweaty with panic instead of arousal, not liking the unknown nature of this anymore, not sure if he could trust himself or Hannibal. He began to tremble. Knowing Hannibal could see it, he sharply turned his head away. Hannibal sighed.

“Will, perhaps this was not such a good idea. At least not so soon.”

“What? No, I just…goddamnit.” Will flopped his arm over his eyes again. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I promise I’m not playing hot and cold on purpose.”

“I know you are not. I suspect you’re wrestling with many internal conflicts right now, none of which you have had the time to properly process given that you have been unconscious off and on for the majority of the time since our…accident. It was wrong of me to further complicate matters, adding to the confusion by moving forward into uncharted territory with such haste while we are both still recovering. You should be allowed to process without outside influence. I should like for you to come to me on your own.”

“I DID. I was. I just – Wait, since when do you care about letting me take my time without influence? Without YOUR influence? Isn’t inserting yourself into my head according to whatever machinations you’re plotting at any given moment a favorite pastime of yours?” Will removed his arm and looked up at Hannibal, surprised by the vitriolic way that came out although it was pretty warranted, all things considered.

“You realized what you were doing, and it horrified you. You retreated into your thoughts of shame and censure. As I once said, if you recall, you delight in wickedness and then berate yourself for it. I do not wish to be intimate with you while you are self-flagellating. I want you to be fully present and aware and choosing to be here. With me. And I fear that if you push through any residual discomfort or capriciousness right now regarding how you feel about me in order to rush into sexual intimacy simply because you crave it and are impatient about receiving it, you will grow cold with resentment as soon as it is over. You will become distant, and we will be back to square one as they say. As for the latter portion, to say that things are different now would be an understatement of gross proportions, wouldn’t you agree? The past should be discarded if it prevents the future from coming to fruition. I understand that in this case, it is hardly possible for the past to not inform the path which you take, and in fact I would advise strongly against disregarding it entirely as you need to have all the information available to you to inform your decisions. But I also would caution against dwelling to the point of inertia. The past can drive you mad and keep you stagnant as an ant frozen in amber. Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.*”

Will felt like he had been open palm slapped with reality. Hannibal reached forward and briefly brought his hand to rest on Will’s cheek. It was chaste and like patting a child on the head, none of the heat of just a few minutes ago. Will felt suddenly very cold despite the fire going hot and bright a few feet away. He watched the flames as Hannibal picked up his shirt and buttoned it. Will grabbed his sweater and as he pulled it over his head, the idea of being a fumbling teenager floated back to him, the aborted sexual experience reminiscent of getting caught by adults or having to run home to make curfew. Bereft and sullen, he picked up his tumbler and took a big swig, musing that more alcohol was probably in his immediate future.

Hannibal’s hand met Will’s shoulder reassuringly.

“I’ll leave you some time to yourself. I’ll be in the study, just beyond the kitchen,” he gestured to a door on the far wall, “if you need me.”

Will nodded tightly. What else was there to say? As much as he hated to admit it, Hannibal was right. There were too many tangled webs of thought in his brain, layers upon layers weaving tightly on top of each other until he couldn’t see through to the bottom. Sex with

anyone wasn't best enjoyed with a head full of persistent anxieties, and both the company involved and the history behind it meant this was going to be so much more than just sex. He went to the bar to pour another drink and settled back onto the couch. Scenes both new and old replayed in Will's mind, dragging and dropping into mental drawers, everything slowly but surely organizing for him to catalog and sift through. The next time he was confronted by Hannibal, he would be sure. Sure of what he wanted and sure not to waver in the face of it when it was given to him.

I'm curious whether either of us can survive separation.

"No, I don't think we can." Will said out loud to the empty room.

Hannibal wasn't in bed when Will woke up. How much did he really sleep? He supposed it was just another item to add to the list of reasons Hannibal wasn't like the rest of us. After all, staying as many steps ahead of everyone as he had for so many years probably required a lot of vigilance. It made sense and suited his otherworldly nature.

Will knew Hannibal had slept for at least a little while because he stirred a bit when he came to bed, feeling the weight shift in the mattress. Neither of them turned to look at one another or attempt to talk, no hands reached out to touch. Will just burrowed into the covers and sailed back into sleep. Thankfully, he slept through the night undisturbed by nightmares of being swallowed by sea creatures or reliving the hellish couple days after the fall. Or if he did, his brain spared him the recollection and rude perspiration-riddled awakening this time.

Delicious smells were wafting up into the bedroom so Will decided to get up, partly because he was hungry and partly because he was curious to see if the atmosphere would be laced with tension from the night before.

"Good morning, Will." Hannibal didn't look up from the skillet. He was making sausage and eggs again, and Will could see something baking in the oven as well.

"Good morning, Hannibal. What's in the oven?"

"Bread."

"You made bread?!"

"Yes. Dough can be frozen as well, Will. Although admittedly it has been harder to maintain the stock here the last couple of years."

Because I was imprisoned. When I gave myself up for you. The unsaid words hung heavy in the air.

“I apologize for the repetition and simplicity of the meals, but we’re rather limited in our options at the moment.”

“Did someone…tend to it while you were…indisposed? Three years is a long time for things to last.”

“You are correct.”

“Who?”

Hannibal looked up, eyebrows raised, a mysterious half smile on his lips.

“Someone with explicit instructions who was paid handsomely and anonymously. Don’t worry yourself, Will.”

Will eyed him skeptically.

“Will, I fled once before. And in that time, did anyone, you, Jack Crawford, the FBI, find out about this house, the existence of which has been meticulously concealed so that it has no detectable association with me?”

“Ok, point taken.”

Will lifted his hands in surrender and perched on a stool at the kitchen island. Hannibal plated their breakfast and sat down across from him, setting a plate in front of each of them.

“The bread should be out in a minute. Coffee?” He gestured to the siphon. Will laughed.

“Yes, please.”

“Why are you laughing?”

“Do you ever make coffee out of a shitty, stained, ten year old plastic carafe like the rest of us?”

“You’ve only been awake for minutes, and you’re already being awfully tiresome,” Hannibal said with a smirk. “Besides, isn’t it nice to be fussed over? Have someone bring out the good china, so to speak, on your behalf?”

“I wasn’t aware that was the case. Are you fussing over me, Dr. Lecter? Trying to impress, perhaps?” Will flirted, smiling over his coffee cup.

“Well, while I certainly would never entertain the notion of buying a *plastic carafe,”* he spat out the words like they tasted sour, “I do have infinitely less complicated means of brewing coffee such as a French press, but yes, I thought perhaps this would be nicer for the occasion.”

“It is. Thanks.” Will smiled warmly, remembering once again that parts of this *were* really pleasant. Relaxing and soothing even. A temporary cessation on the running and the carnage. He involuntarily clenched his jaw thinking about how he was going to willingly break that

peace with the conversation he was about to start, but he knew it was necessary and didn't really care to spend the rest of the day avoiding the subject. It would cast an anticipatory dark cloud over the day. Best to just rip the band-aid off.

"Hannibal."

Hannibal raised his head attentively. Did he already know what Will was going to say?

"Yes, Will?"

"What you said yesterday…about considering the past but not dwelling on it?"

"Yes, I remember."

"When you left me alone to think last night, something occurred to me. I haven't thought about Molly once this week. Not Alana, not Jack, the only longing I've experienced so far is for my dogs. When I picture them…Molly, Alana, all of them…it's like they're someone else's memories, like I'm watching home movies in someone's living room and tailoring my reactions to what I think they'd want to hear. Like a social autopilot setting that is disingenuous at best and disturbingly sociopathic at worst. They've only left ghosts of impressions, wisps of smoke that just dissolve if I try to catch them. They don't feel real to me. It doesn't feel like me when I remember my time with them, and part of me feels really horrible about that, but it's true…But I do see *you*. When I look in either direction, forward or back, I see you. *You* feel like me. I feel like me when I'm with you. More than I ever have with anyone else or even than I have when I've been alone. And I can't guarantee that I won't keep seesawing like I did last night but only about details like navigating aspects of our new life. Just because things are new to me, and I'm not sure what my boundaries and rules are about them doesn't mean I'm second guessing the entire relationship. I'm just feeling out where I fit into it and how things are going to work. I'm not going to change my mind about being here. With you. Wherever *here* might be. I need you to know and trust that. Remember when I told you we had begun to blur?"

"Of course. You remember how I greeted you?"

If I saw you every day, forever, Will, I would remember this time. Recalling it sent goosebumps up and down the back of Will's arms and neck.

"Yes." Will smiled lovingly and took one of Hannibal's hands in his.

"That moment was…one of the most profound of my life. Sometimes I wish I could just live in that moment. You and me sitting in front of the Botticelli. Something about it was…the summation of everything…You know, I asked Bedelia if you were in love with me."

"And what did she say?" Hannibal's expression remained collected, not betraying any intent, but it was clear Will had his attention.

"Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for you and find nourishment at the very sight of you? Yes. But do you…ache for him?"

Hannibal kept his eyes trained on Will's, and Will saw the glint of excitement in them. The faintest change, one that few could detect in someone as inscrutable as Hannibal, but he saw it.

"And do you, Will?"

"God, yes." *It hurts and it excites me and it's beautiful and familiar yet foreign and everything all at once.* He kept the rest to himself, aware that giving too much would veer his command of the situation off course. "Who else would either of us truly fit with?"

"No one. Thank you for thinking this over and sharing your findings with me, Will." Hannibal squeezed his hand, and they kept their eyes locked for a minute, absorbed in each other, time slowing to a standstill.

"Of course. Look, I know there are a lot of things still left to filter through. Like the obvious fact that we can't stay here forever, but – "

"Don't trouble yourself yet, Will. There's time, and I would not wish to burden you with too much at once. For now, may I say that I am very glad that you are simply here." It was clear from his meaningful look that "here" carried a much greater connotation than just their present location.

"Me too…You're so calm. I don't even…" Will was at a loss for what to say. *You remarkable bastard. Why do I feel so safe with you when I should be afraid?*

Hannibal smiled and took a bite of his breakfast.

"You forget that I've had quite a lot of practice in this area. Much more than you, I dare say."

"Much more than anyone, I'd venture to guess."

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully.

"Most likely, yes."

Will started laughing and found that he couldn't stop. It veered into hysterical territory, tears leaking out of the corners of his eyes.

"Are you having a fit of some sort?"

Oh you know, just me and my cannibal murderer boyfriend casually talking at the breakfast table about how he has successfully avoided capture and being exposed for what he truly is by his colleagues and friends for so long because he's had such ample practice. No big deal. Nothing to see here. This is a normal existence. I am a fellow human just like all of you. Beep boop.

Will struggled to catch his breath, gulping down air. When he regained his composure, he wasn't sure what to say. He knew the humor wouldn't exactly translate well to Hannibal.

“I’m sorry. It’s just...there’s a profound absurdity to this. To us. The whole situation. It just hit me, and I couldn’t stop laughing. I hope I didn’t –” He took a couple more stabilizing deep breaths, “offend you.”

Hannibal actually let out a small laugh, a rare occurrence and one that made Will’s heart soar.

“Not at all. It’s always very pleasurable to see you getting a respite from the tenacity of your usually serious ruminations, however brief that respite may be. And you are quite correct. There is very much a grandiose, hyperbolic element to our…dare I say saga?”

“Achilles and Patroclus.”

Hannibal smiled fondly at Will, glad to see he remembered that.

“Yes, exactly.”

Will tried to picture what Hannibal would say if such a pedestrian label like “boyfriend” were suggested to him as a descriptor of their relationship. Probably something like “do stop being so tiresome, Will. This is hardly the 1950s. I’m not going to ask your father for your hand in marriage.” Or “We are not two characters on a detestable, vapid teenage television program.” with a disgusted wrinkle of his nose. That was just as well. The very nature of their connection defied conventional labels.

A kitchen timer dinged, and Hannibal rose to take the bread out of the oven, turning the pan upside down and emptying it onto a cooling rack.

“Can I eat a slice while it’s still hot?”

Hannibal smiled.

“Of course. You are such a little boy sometimes, Will. It’s rather endearing.”

“I am not,” He said peevishly, inadvertently making him appear even more boyish. “Hot bread fresh out of the oven just happens to be one of the best tasting things in the world, that’s all.”

“I couldn’t agree more.”

He sliced off a piping hot portion of the loaf and deposited it on Will’s plate, then turned around and reached into the fridge for a dish of butter. Will knifed a generous slab onto his bread and watched it melt.

“Really? It’s not quite as exotic as ortolans.”

“No, but food, much like anything else, has its time and place. Different fuel for different purposes. Sometimes the simple provides pleasures the complex cannot. There is a purity to very simple yet well-made dishes; eating anything that was prepared with your own two hands or the hands of someone for whom you care is one of the most intimate expressions of connection, and it can be immensely satisfying to craft something beautiful and useful with one’s own hands. People have communed over food since the birth of humanity, and of

course those early feasts were a far cry from the elaborate, gourmet concoctions that exist today, but the connection and sense of community is very much the same. They brought people together in a profound sense. It is no accident that life's milestones are frequently marked by celebratory food and shared meals."

"I like listening to you wax poetic about the little things." Christ, he heard himself, and it sounded moony and love sick floating back into his ears, but it made him happy regardless. The conversation also lent a more innocent motive to all of the past meals Hannibal had shared with Will and Jack.

"Due in no small part to my sexy voice, no doubt." He smirked and raised his eyebrows at Will.

"I will throw this bread at you and never touch you again."

"I'm sorry. I could not resist. Don't be cross." Hannibal reached across the island and ruffled Will's hair, swooping his fingers to the back and cradling his ear before dropping his hand.

They finished their breakfast in comfortable silence, Will feeling a little flushed from the touch, happy to see that things were alright between them. He listened to the chirping of the birds outside and felt like he was home.

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They decided to take a short walk in the afternoon, Hannibal suggesting that a little movement would be good for them both, an opportunity to loosen any lingering soreness in their limbs and pump their lungs full of fresh country air. They ambled leisurely around the lake, the sun glinting off the water and reminding Will of his fly fishing trips. He idly wondered if Hannibal would accompany him fishing someday. He pictured Hannibal on the bank of a river, lounging supine on a blanket with a book in hand, the sun illuminating the fine angles of his face, his hair blowing subtly in the breeze as Will stood ankle deep in the water a few yards away. Hannibal would probably pack a heightened version of picnic food for them, exotic fruits, rare cheeses, and painstakingly selected wine that cost more than the most expensive thing Will has ever owned.

Only a week ago, Will wouldn't have been able to picture it without scoffing at the plausibility, but he imagined it so easily now. He would probably be content to read while Will fished, satisfied to exist side by side without talking for a while. Will felt a sharp twinge of guilt strike through him like lightning as he imagined Hannibal passing those three years in BSHCI by vivid imagination and books alone. But in a way, it helped to remember that since it was a reminder that Hannibal had betrayal from Will's side to forgive as well. Knowing that he had done that, that he had moved past the pain of letting someone truly see him only to discover that it had been an elaborate ruse (only partly of course, god knows Will

had gotten more than he bargained for the longer that plan unfolded, his own feelings taking over all rational parts of his brain), past the loneliness of willingly giving up that which he treasured above all else, his freedom, not just in the sense of being physically imprisoned but also the tamping down and denial of his true nature, only to have Will ignore him for years, made Will feel better about what he had to forfeit and move beyond on his end. He wasn't the only one who had made sacrifices.

Will took a seat by the lake's edge, settling his back against a tree. He closed his eyes, leaned his head back, and deeply inhaled the pine scented air. He heard Hannibal sit down next to him. Will opened his eyes slowly and turned his head to look at Hannibal. Hannibal smiled, and Will's body filled with warmth, the blood rushing ever lower. *Jesus, you would think I'd been trapped in a monastery for the last three years,* he thought, feeling a little silly at how the sheer sight of Hannibal seemed to turn him on. Meanwhile, Hannibal actually *had* been in the equivalent of a monastery for the last three years, and yet he seemed perfectly impervious and in control as ever. Not that one could always tell what Hannibal was feeling, not even Will. He still only revealed what he wanted to.

"Penny for your thoughts, Mr. Graham?"

Will chuckled and watched the water ripple in the breeze.

"My thoughts aren't worth a penny. You should save your money for something more important."

"I highly doubt that."

Will paused, uncertain how to proceed without coming across as intrusive or needy.

"When you were…" How to phrase it? Locked up? Incarcerated? Every possible term seemed rather insensitive and too crude to describe someone as elegant and graceful as Hannibal.

"Under the dubiously motivated care of Dr. Bloom?"

Will was grateful that Hannibal took pity on him and finished the sentence in a tasteful manner.

"Yes…I…I don't know how to ask this exactly."

"You are wondering how it was for me? If I found it difficult?"

"Yes." Will had a pained expression on his face as he looked at the ground.

"I was there of my own volition, Will. I do not want you to harbor any of the responsibility for that. It would be an unfair and inaccurate burden. It robs me of my autonomy as well. Besides, you had your own stint in confinement due almost entirely to me."

"An eye for an eye?"

“In a manner of speaking although I must reiterate that when it was my turn to compensate, I did so willingly.”

He wanted to press further but wasn’t sure what he was digging for. An admission of longing? Did he want Hannibal to admit he pined for him to return for those three years and ached with disappointment every time he didn’t come, every time the visitor’s door opened to reveal someone else? Will knew Hannibal would never make a naked, vulnerable confession peppered with “I love you”s, but he needed something. A declaration of feelings of some sort, even if only limited.

“What if you get bored with me? What if I don’t prove to be the captivating companion you’ve imagined?” Will hadn’t intended to blurt that out.

Hannibal looked at Will with a note of surprise.

“Considering my fascination never waned even when the obstacles were arguably insurmountable and when I did not have you at all, I should hardly think that possible. And I already know you to be a companion for whom the word captivating does not begin to do justice. What is prompting this worry?”

“I don’t know…you’ve spent so long trying to coax me over to your side, manipulating the elements to get what you wanted. Now that you have me, I can’t help but wonder if the thrill was the chase, the hunt. If the actual reality will pale in comparison.”

“I was never hunting you, Will. Planting suggestions and guidance to help you discover yourself, yes, but you were not a prize to be won.”

Will glanced over at him, face grown taut with stress.

“You are not reassured.”

“Not really, no.”

“It saddens me that you would ever doubt how magnificent you are to me. No singular entity in this world had ever truly seen me before you. And you have not only seen but looked right back, fearless and defiant, subverting and exceeding my expectations at every turn. Bedelia was right to quote Dante to you. The very sight of you is nourishment indeed, but I crave and look forward to having so much more, to sharing things I have never shared with another. You asked me to trust that you will not change your mind about being here even when you are wavering about the specifics. I would ask you to do the same. Trust that I know what I want. Trust that if you had not returned to me for another three years or another three decades, I would still have been waiting, ready as ever to fuse together, to eclipse one another and yet also exist in harmony side by side as we are not the same, but rather two sides of the same coin.”

With all my knowledge and intrusion, I could never predict you. I can feed the caterpillar, I can whisper through the chrysalis, but when it hatches, it follows its own nature and is beyond me. The words came back to Will and he understood more than he had when he first heard Hannibal utter them. Will had felt like such a puppet in those days, but he realized now

that Hannibal didn't desire to purely pull his strings. He desired a true partner, not someone to control or who submits to his every whim. Where would the fun be in something as simple and predictable as that? Will broke into a beatific grin, and Hannibal grinned back. This wasn't an uneven, unbalanced, unfair exchange. Both parties had to adapt, and it had been a long time since Will allowed himself to contemplate just how much it meant that Hannibal had let him in to the extent that he did, that he turned himself in for him, that he never stopped waiting. That he *loved* him (he did, didn't he? If this wasn't love, they were doing a bang-up job of simulating it.) Will was too angry, too hurt, too confused to allow himself to think it, to believe it during all those years apart. And another part of him was so sick with an urgent longing, steadily trying to beat its way out like a pickaxe chipping away at granite, that he couldn't let creep in lest it take him over and make it impossible to go on with his life. Hannibal's words assuaged Will's concern for now. It was nice to hear it.

"Ok. I trust you."

"We should head back soon."

"Let's stay here for the sunset. It's a lovely view." Will let his head fall on Hannibal's shoulder.

"That could be an hour yet."

"I'm fine with that."

Hannibal brought his arm to rest around Will's shoulder and leaned his cheek against the top of Will's head. They stayed like that, neither of them making a sound, until the last rays of sun faded to deep purple hues and descended below the horizon leaving behind the stark, rich star-studded black only the country sky could.

Chapter End Notes

So thus concludes chapter 2! I hope you enjoyed it and feel free to share your thoughts. :) I'm probably going to shoot for a chapter a week which, thankfully, I'm already on track for with chapter 3 at the moment (things are getting a wwhhooolllee lot smuttier with that one so far). I'm still not totally sure how many chapters this will be, but I'm definitely not done with it.

EDIT: forgot to note that the quote about life being understood backwards is Kierkegaard. I even put the * there to remind me, and STILL forgot to put the note here.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Hope you all had a pleasant Valentine's Day, Fannibals! This ended up being an appropriate chapter for the week of V Day since things just got progressively smuttier and romantic as I went on. Hope you enjoy it, and a very grateful thank you to Effisaurus for being a beta reader to give me some guidance for this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning Will woke up alone as usual, blindly feeling for Hannibal's warmth and finding only a fistful of cotton sheets. It was wonderful to wake up to mouthwatering smells yet again; he could get used to being taken care of like this although he hoped to find some way to return the favor soon. He was largely a floundering disaster in the culinary arts and had an inkling that whatever housekeeping skills he possessed probably weren't up to Hannibal's perfectionist standards so he wasn't really sure how to repay him. *Oh, I'm sure you could think of a way.* Will's skin erupted in tingles as he pictured Hannibal saying those words, a wicked grin on his curved mouth. They had slept with legs and arms entwined last night, Will unsure at first if he wanted to push for more and eventually settling on leaning into the embrace, content to just be held so close for now.

Will made his way into the kitchen and saw a frittata cooling on the counter and a cutting board full of fresh ingredients: tomatoes, chives, and parsley. He immediately froze.

"Hannibal?" Doing a quick visual sweep of the cabin, he found no trace of him.

As if summoned psychically, Hannibal appeared at the sliding glass door to the back porch, a few freshly chopped logs in hand. He opened the door and walked over to deposit the wood in front of the fireplace.

"Ah, I see you have risen at last. I did not wish to disturb your rest, but breakfast was starting to get cold."

"Yeah, about that…where did you get ripe produce?" Will narrowed his eyes, a mixture of concern and anger bubbling like acid in his throat. He swallowed hard as if to command his irritation to travel to the pit of his stomach where it could be digested away before he said anything he might regret. He was sure Hannibal wouldn't take well to having his capability challenged, would view it as being chastised like a child.

"I suspected you might take issue with that. Will, this location was not chosen by accident. Great care was taken to consider all factors, nothing was left to chance. This area is very secluded, and the local shop from which I purchased those is barely a shop in name as it is a

glorified produce stand managed by two elderly, myopic farmers who are hardly in touch enough with the outside world to notice me and understand what it is they are seeing."

"That's a slightly flawed conclusion to come to considering that you're pretty damn *noticeable.*"

Hannibal flashed him a look that was half irritation, half amusement.

"Once again, I must remind you that I have had a vast amount of practice blending in and existing undetected in a variety of arenas. Confidence is of course a large portion of the equation as is the ability to read people uncannily well. However, I do not have to employ that skill as often as one might suppose as people are rather transparent a disappointing majority of the time. And naturally, there are parlor tricks such as altering one's accent or adjusting one's body language and gait that can very effective tools of deception. People are naturally prone to self-involvement. It can be easy to use that to your advantage. And on occasion, I can be quite charming."

You're one to talk, Mr. Textbook Narcissist. Maybe you're too self-involved to notice when other people aren't. Charming indeed. More like charming asshole. He had to physically bite down on his lip to keep it from coming out, knowing it wouldn't help the situation no matter how satisfying it would be to practice a little sharp tameshigiri on him right now. He knew he wouldn't win. Not really. Besides, his anger was misplaced. He took a second to marvel at how much he cared, at the fact that his concern almost led him to lash out and incite bickering. It was almost average couple behavior if it weren't for the whole "I don't want you to get caught because you're on the FBI's most wanted list" factor.

Hannibal noticed anyway.

"Will, I would not risk our freedom wantonly. I promise I am not being flippant with your concerns. I am simply pointing out elements you may have neglected to take into account regarding my abilities, but I do appreciate that you worry."

Well, I love you, you idiot. Of course I worry. The thought was still too new for him to dare to utter it aloud. Besides, he wasn't sure that Hannibal would respond to such a saccharine, commonplace display of affection. It didn't really seem like him. Will doubted that a relationship with Hannibal would follow any of the romantic conventions or expected trajectories that he had come to know and anticipate. It already hadn't to an almost surreal, comical extent.

"Sorry. I know you can handle yourself to a frighteningly competent degree. I just can't help but worry."

"It is natural to do so. A little worry keeps the rabbit's ears turned up sharply for the sound of the predator's footsteps, but he does not let it interfere with his ability to graze in the field until he is sated."

"Balance."

"Yes. Now, shall we eat?"

Will nodded and waved his hand toward the kitchen counter as if to say, “after you.” Hannibal dished out the food as usual (Will smiled at how they were settling into a routine), formed the tomatoes around the edges of the frittata slices, and sprinkled both plates with a smattering of herbs, elevating the whole presentation to that of a full page spread from a glossy magazine. He paused to evaluate the plates, and then reached into the cabinet for a clear glass grinder full of sea salt. With a couple swift cranks, he gave the tomatoes on each plate a dash of salt.

“This looks amazing. Thank you for doing this every day. I feel kind of useless.”

“Nonsense. It has always been my pleasure to cook for you, although I do regret that I can’t use the full breadth of my culinary prowess in our current location.”

“My, feeling very humble this morning, aren’t you?” Will said with a smirk.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow as if to say “have you *seen* my dinner party spreads?” and when he turned to the right to pour two cups of coffee for them, Will could see that he was fighting a smile.

“In addition to procuring us some more food, I took the liberty of checking the status of the FBI’s…Thoughts on the aftermath of our mutual destruction of Mr. Dolarhyde.”

Will’s hand paused in midair, fork halfway to his mouth. Of course he knew they had to broach the subject eventually, but he still felt a pang of regret at the disturbance in the idyllic little existence of the past couple days. He wanted to crawl further in, staying cozy and protected from the outside world, pretending that things weren’t as they were. That they weren’t on the run. That they couldn’t be apprehended at any time, a thick and deadly needle piercing the bubble and changing everything in a matter of seconds, separating them before they even had a chance to begin their new life. Will took a deep breath, rolled his shoulders back, and composed himself. Putting it off would do neither of them any favors.

“And what did you find?” He forced himself to take a bite, but the food struggled to make its way down his bone dry throat.

“It appears that Jack Crawford is still hopeful; they have moved the search inland after finding no remains in the water and are not presuming us to be dead yet. No details about any evidence found on the shore or in any of the surrounding areas where we stopped along our way here.”

“They could be withholding that information in hopes that we’ll read it and think we’re in the clear. Draw us out with false security.”

Hannibal nodded tightly and took a bite of frittata.

“My thoughts precisely. And the thoughts of our inimitable friend Ms. Lounds as well.”

Hannibal smiled and took a sip of coffee. Will rolled his eyes and leaned back on his stool.

“God, I don’t even want to know what that ever frantically buzzing mosquito is saying. I imagine ‘murder husbands’ found its way back into her lexicon.” Will was practically spitting.

“Such ire. Such indignation. Perhaps someday, when all the proverbial dust is settled, we will have to pay her a visit…” Hannibal smiled conspiratorially as he looked at Will, “unannounced of course.”

Will was surprised to find himself intrigued by the thought, but he still wasn’t sure where he stood with that facet of their new lives. That facet of *himself.*

“I doubt the dust will be settled enough for that any time soon.” Will said, skirting the issue as much as he could.

Hannibal looked like he wanted to press further, but he didn’t.

“Indeed. Well, things being such as they are, I propose we remain here for a while longer. I do not think it prudent to make any sudden moves while it appears that they are lying in wait for us to do just that. With luck on our side, we will truly be presumed dead eventually which would be advantageous when we make the journey to wherever we ultimately choose. I do think that your plan, reckless and potentially perilous though it was, made the chances for that outcome quite good.”

His plan. Will chewed the words, let them rattle around in his head.

“I must confess; I was uncertain if I misread your intentions when you first came to me with the artifice of a fake escape.”

“You? Uncertain?”

Hannibal gave him an amused look.

“I am always less certain in matters that pertain to you, Will. As hard as that is for me to admit, it is true. While you have many moments of transparency as anyone does, I still find your thought process to be somewhat impenetrable when you want it to be, and I shall never tire of trying to unravel it as completely as I can.”

Will smiled warmly at him. Truth be told, Will wasn’t wholly certain that he had meant for them to survive and be as they were now either. As he flung them both into the jaws of the lethal waters below, part of him had hoped they wouldn’t survive. That the violent dance would just *end,* no psychological warfare to be waged anymore, ending with a bang but still ending in peace. He had been half convinced that it was the only way either of them could definitively move on. Still, when he woke in the cold sand with Hannibal’s arms around him, no compunction for the outcome could be found, only relief to be in that embrace where he knew he belonged. They hadn’t really talked about the details since their survival although Will couldn’t say he was surprised that Hannibal instinctively knew his intentions without it having to be explicitly discussed. That was what Will had been banking on when he made his decision, and it was never more apparent than it was that night with Dolarhyde that Hannibal and Will could communicate through the nuance of body language more expertly than most

could through blatant dialogue. It had still been a tremendous risk albeit one that had paid off in the end.

“Side effect of your inconvenient compassion? Clouding your judgement maybe?”

“I do not consider it to be so inconvenient now.” Hannibal smiled playfully.

Will melted under that gaze. He was struck with the urge to throw everything off the kitchen island, climb up, and pull Hannibal on top of him. He shook it off as a realization came to him.

“Wait…you have internet here?”

“Yes, in the study. I was not sure if it would still be functioning as I had not checked on the arrangements for it in quite some time, but capitalism favors automated payment without question as you might imagine.”

“Hmmph.” Will hadn’t really thought about connection with the outside world to that extent since their arrival, but as he thought it over, he found himself remembering the trite adage about curiosity and the cat. He knew once he looked, he wouldn’t be able to stop until he was hunched over a computer for so long that his muscles screamed in pain, his body contorted until it resembled a gnarled tree root. Torturing himself with articles about their disappearance, he would unceasingly sift through every morsel of information for some clue as to what Jack and the FBI were really thinking and would probably end up none the wiser. He was in no rush to drive himself crazy like that.

“You may feel free to use it if you like.”

“No, I think I’ll opt for the ignorance is bliss route.” Besides, he was sure Hannibal would relay anything of relevance to him.

“Understandable. You can be…rather singular in pursuit.”

Will looked askance at him.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I did not mean anything offensive by it. Singular obsession was an invaluable skill in the work you did for Jack, but I could see how it might be more stressful than useful to you in this particular set of circumstances.”

The tension in Will’s shoulders eased.

“Yeah…that’s about the size of it.”

Will ate the rest of his breakfast, trying not to stew in anxiety, trying not to let his imagination utilize its full potential in conjuring up worst case scenarios. Ever aware of Will’s mercurial nature, Hannibal reached out a hand and firmly held the side of Will’s face. He didn’t have to say anything. He never really did. Will knew.

Hannibal seemed happy enough to read in silence, but Will was still keyed up from the discussion earlier and was having difficulty coming back down. He was restlessly pacing back and forth in the living room while Hannibal stretched out on the couch, long and lean.

“Come here.” Hannibal said, finally putting his book down and turning his attention to the fidgety man turning his living room floor into a stage for an uptight marching exercise.

Will sighed and walked over to stand in front of him. Hannibal sat upright and patted the cushion next to him. Sitting down, Will tried to unclench his shoulders and back, noticing that every inch of his body had tensed into a tight coil.

“Turn to the right.”

Will complied, hunched over in a position that resembled a sullen teenage, his body curled into itself like it was fighting to disappear. Hannibal wound a hand around either shoulder and guided them back so he was sitting up a littler straighter.

“What are you doing? Giving me posture lessons? Is this about to turn into a 1950s educational film strip? I slouch. It’s what I do.”

Will could practically hear the exasperated eye roll from Hannibal.

“You really do excel at being tedious when you set your mind to the task.” Hannibal dug his thumbs into Will’s shoulders, massaging in circles with a pressure so firm it balanced on the edge of painful and pleasurable.

“Whatever. You like my insolence. If I were anyone else, I would have ‘cause of death: he was unspeakably and unforgivably rude’ as my epitaph by now.”

A short, low laugh emanated from Hannibal as he moved his fingers from Will’s shoulders to the base of his neck.

“I suppose you are quite right in that regard.”

“Mmm. You’re good at this.” Will arched back, automatically leaning into the touch. God, he really had to have a talk with his body about betraying neediness without his consent.

Hannibal’s hands made their way down Will’s back, coaxing all the stiffness out of the muscles until he felt like putty in Hannibal’s grasp. He scooted back further, Hannibal’s knees opening wider in welcome as his head met Hannibal’s chest. Strong hands pulled his hips until their bodies were flush, back to chest. Those hands found the edge of Will’s sweater and glided under, dancing across his ribs and bringing a layer of gooseflesh to the surface of his pale abdomen.

“I don’t think those muscles are sore.”

“No, but they do demand to be touched, don’t they?”

“Yes.” He gasped, bending back again, desperate to be pressed as closely as possible to Hannibal.

“The way you arch against me, so supple and feverish with desire, as though the smallest touch leaves you completely undone, is intoxicating. Small and boyish yet strong and deadly, aren’t you? So beautiful. I want to possess you completely and make you feel like no one ever has.”

Hannibal’s husky murmurs in his ear were unbearably erotic, his lips brushing ever so slightly against Will’s skin with each enunciation, the sensation of hot breath sending ripples of longing through his body as Hannibal’s fingers caressed his stomach and chest. Every word made his cock harder and his cheeks hot; he was so sensitive it felt like Hannibal’s hands dipping lower would dissolve him like a log left burning too long, melting into ash with a simple tap of the fire iron and wafting away in the breeze until it had dissipated into nothingness. When a thumb brushed over his nipple, he bit down on his bottom lip to stifle a groan.

“You already do.” The last couple syllables eked out in an involuntary whine, Will aware of just how helplessly submissive he sounded but basking in it instead of recoiling in humiliation like he had the last time they touched on this couch.

“Now,” Hannibal lifted Will’s chin, bringing them eye to eye, “can you tell me what you want?”

Will swallowed and steeled his resolve, determined not to have a repeat of two days ago. Clasping Hannibal’s hand and guiding it to rest just above the waistband of his pants, he looked straight into those dark, intense eyes.

“I want you to touch me. I want you to make me come. I need – ” His voice trailed off in yet another desperate whine.

“I know you do.” Hannibal rasped, unbuttoning Will’s pants and lowering the zipper, never taking his eyes off him. He reached inside Will’s boxers without bothering to take his clothes off, both of them so full of urgency to finally touch like this. Hannibal gripped his erection at the base and gave a few tentative strokes, watching Will for approval. Will moaned and writhed against Hannibal’s chest, head falling into the crook of his neck. Hannibal tightened his grip and sped up, twisting his hand near the head in a way that made Will quiver.

“I…I can’t believe you’re touching me like this. I wish…God, I wish we’d done this years ago.” Did he? Was he just overcome with pleasure and confessing nonsense? Will wasn’t sure how long he had wanted Hannibal like this. He spent so much time and energy denying it, burying it as deep as he could, piling on distractions and trying on different masks to see what fit in place of what he knew deep down to be true that he couldn’t be sure when it had started.

“I’ve wanted to touch you for so long.” Hannibal said, tilting Will’s face up to look at him.

“Why didn’t you? I wish you’d fucked me over your desk, in your kitchen.” Images of Hannibal abandoning preparation of one of his famously pretentious dishes and shoving aside picturesque food to have Will on the counter right then and there flickered behind his eyelids, just the thought of it almost making him come. Hannibal gave him a sudden hard stroke, thumb sliding over the head, pre come already leaking out in pearly drops.

“Uuhhnn, Hannibal. I…” Will let out a string of unintelligible syllables, his arousal so delirious he could barely see, barely knew what was escaping his lips. He wanted to last longer, but it was all too much, reaching the apex he’d been climbing toward for so long. He hardly remembered his life before Hannibal, hardly remembered who he was without Hannibal being the catalyst to defining it.

Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?

Mine? Before you and after you.

The words rang in his ears like it was happening right now, as though their past, present, and future were stacked upon each other in thin layers fused together, a Mobius strip of two lives becoming one. Hannibal licked his ear and murmured something in Italian, his low, rough, sensual voice drawing a series of stuttering moans out of Will. He threaded his tongue down Will’s neck, and when he bit down hard enough to bruise, it was enough to send Will over the edge, spilling hot wet heat on his stomach and Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal held him through the aftershocks of his orgasm, softly petting his hair and pressing gentle kisses to his temple and the top of his head.

“Oh my god…that was…” Will struggled to catch his ragged breath. He wanted to turn around and squeeze Hannibal tight, kiss him until their lips were sore and whisper “I love you” in as many ways as he could, but it could never be enough. He was loosely aware that he should get up to clean himself off but was so awash in a dreamy, euphoric state that he feared would burst if he so much as blinked. Hannibal, as aware as ever, carefully slid out from under him.

“I’ll be back in a minute, dear Will.” He said with a light kiss to Will’s forehead.

He came back with clean hands and a warm, wet washcloth. Will reached for it with a lazy hand, but Hannibal waved him away, shaking his head. Hannibal cleaned him off, and Will smiled lovingly at him. The sheer amount of times Hannibal could have been described as “sweet” these past few days was completely flooring him.

“Thank you.”

Hannibal only smiled in response, disappearing for a moment to get rid of the washcloth and returning quickly to put his arms securely around Will. He felt so safe and anchored in Hannibal’s embrace. Will made a mental note to recall this feeling the next time he had doubts about the veracity of all this.

“Oh wait…I’m a selfish asshole. I didn’t even think about –” Will whipped around, hands reaching for Hannibal’s pants, but he caught him at the wrist.

“I did not do that because I expect reciprocity, and I unquestionably do not want you to reciprocate out of some sense of obligation you feel –”

Hannibal was interrupted by Will straddling him and planting an ardent kiss on his lips, shutting him up for once.

“I really, really,” Will undid the top button of Hannibal’s shirt, “don’t,” another, “feel obligated” and another.

“But I do,” he said, undoing the last couple buttons, “desperately want to see you come and know I’m the one making you feel like that.”

“How prurient and vulgar you are after only a few short days. I did not expect this so soon. How should I reward you for it?”

Hannibal pulled Will’s head back, grabbing his hair at the root, sending sparks straight to his belly. He would have been hard again in a second if he could be so soon.

“You did expect it though, didn’t you? Maybe not right away, but you knew I would.”

“Yes.”

“How?”

Hannibal sighed and gave him that “you really are clueless” look he had given him that first morning in the cabin.

“Tell me, do your platonic friendships with other men generally result in plans to run away to Europe together or you sailing across the Atlantic on a romantic solitary voyage to find them?” His eyes were mischievous and condescending, and Will wasn’t sure if he wanted to slap him or kiss him.

“I was trying to find a killer. For the FBI.” It sounded flimsy even as it left his tongue.

“Mmm, of course you were.”

“Fine, I wanted to find you and be your arm candy to all the stuffy, erudite engagements of the pompous Florence elite for the rest of our lives until death do us part. That better?” Will mocked.

“So impudent. Well…I think while not completely true down to the details, yes, that would have been more honest.”

“Let’s go upstairs. I want more space for this.”

Hannibal’s features darkened with lust, and it made Will’s heart feel like it would burst.

As they ascended the stairs, Will was dizzy with the thrill of anticipation, the heady aroma of it almost tangible. He knew he wouldn’t falter this time, but he was still nervous about being a capable partner. Something told him Hannibal, preferring to savor every opportunity to

push the boundaries of human experience instead of shying away from it, had done this before even if Will had not known him to be in any homosexual relationships. It wasn't as if Hannibal had been very forthcoming about his past anyway. The nature of his life and his darkest secrets made limited sharing not only a choice but a necessity.

Will sat on the edge of the bed and bid his face to relax and not betray any hint of apprehension. Hannibal stood between Will's legs, nudging them apart with his knees. Placing a hand in the middle of his chest, he pushed Will on his back and climbed on top of him, reaching his hand up to clasp Will's left wrist and pin it behind his head.

"While I fully intend to give you what you asked for, I am in no rush to get there, if that's alright with you."

Will nodded, bringing up his free hand to trace the edges of that impossibly handsome face. How had he stood in the privacy of Hannibal's office at night for so many weeks in a row, just the two of them, and not noticed how arresting he was? He thought back to what he had unintentionally divulged in passion a few short minutes ago. They could have discreetly fucked in that office, and no one would have been the wiser. What would it have been like if they'd had an affair? Would Will still have discovered what he was? Would being lovers first have made him more accepting or more disgusted at the revelation?

"Stay here with me, Will."

"Sorry. Bad habit."

"I know it's nearly automatic for you, and that it is a struggle to stay out of your head, the thoughts beckoning and coming faster than you can disperse and dispose of them, but try."

"I will. I can."

Hannibal nodded approvingly and released Will's wrist, stepping back off the bed.

"Take off your clothes, please."

Will obeyed, turning halfway around so he didn't have to look at Hannibal as he undressed. He felt so exposed, and it both thrilled and terrified him. He laid down in the middle of the bed, and when he finally turned his head back to Hannibal, the look of reverence he saw for him and his body churned his bashfulness into arousal, his cock fighting to get hard again.

Keeping his eyes fixed on Will's, Hannibal began to undress as well, slowly and deliberately, making sure Will was watching. He stopped at his underwear, slipping into bed next to Will with the grace of a sleek jungle cat.

"Are we going to…um…" Will gulped, suddenly wondering if the mention of being fucked by Hannibal meant he had entered a contract to do so. While he knew he wanted that eventually, *needed* it even, he wasn't sure he could handle something so new so quickly. It was a big jump for him to make.

“Not tonight. I don’t think you are ready for that. Try to push the signpost of an end destination out of your mind for the remainder of the evening. I want to explore you, and I want you to explore me as well, both of us free of expectation and goals. This is not a race to the finish line nor is it an endurance test. We are in no hurry, and you have nothing to prove to me. I think you will find it much more enjoyable if you can mentally reframe it like that.”

Will nodded, relaxing his limbs. Hannibal knew just what to say, knew how to calm his fears, knew how his brain worked and how to still the maelstrom when he saw it brewing, steering him back to shore.

“Why did you leave those on?” He gestured to Hannibal’s silken boxers.

“I thought removing them might spur you into action to tend to the aforementioned end goal. I want your focus elsewhere to start with.”

“You’re taking such good care of me.” Will whispered, voice full of tenderness.

Hannibal delicately took Will’s fingers and kissed the knuckles.

“That’s all I wish to do tonight.” Hannibal purred into Will’s neck, kissing his way up to his lips.

Will drank in the kiss, heeding Hannibal’s advice and taking his time and focusing on every little sensation, drowning out everything in his head to replace it with this. With Hannibal. His touch, his breath, his body.

“Fuck, Hannibal…how do you kiss me like that?” Will snickered softly, “It’s like no one ever has before.”

“Everything between us is unprecedented. Neither of us have ever previously known connection like this so in a way it is very much the first time anyone has kissed you like this. I myself did not think I would ever be allowed to have what I have found with you. I did not think I was capable nor did I think anyone capable or worthy of navigating a life with me, a life behind the veil. I have never trusted like this.” Hannibal ran his fingers through Will’s hair, smoothing unruly tufts back from his forehead.

Wrapping his hand around Hannibal’s wrist, Will turned the palm to his lips and kissed and licked, mouth moving up to close around two of his slim fingers, sucking and licking hungrily on them. Will moaned around Hannibal’s fingers, tongue darting over the knuckles as he pushed them in and out of his mouth, allowing himself to imagine what they would feel like inside him.

Hannibal extricated his fingers and pressed his body closer to Will, entwining their legs. Will could feel Hannibal’s erection again his stomach and it felt so good to know he was responsible, that he could provoke such a reaction from a man so controlled and self-possessed. Hannibal leaned in to kiss him, but Will pulled back.

“Not to disrupt the mood, but can I ask you something?”

“Anything at all. And do not worry about dispelling the atmosphere. As I said, we are not in any rush.”

“Do you…desire this normally? I mean, the way people generally do? I’ve only known you to have affairs as sort of a safeguard, a part of your person suit to complete an image that doesn’t incite questions and doubts so you can protect your identity, like with Alana. I know it’s different with me, but I guess I just wondered if sex was something you could sort of do without most of the time if it weren’t for all the necessary normalcy measures.”

Hannibal didn’t speak for a moment, dancing his fingers across Will’s collarbone and bicep, gathering his thoughts.

“No, I haven’t historically needed it with the regularity that most people do. That is not to say I was without lascivious urges, but rather that I coordinated their release in ways that were convenient and beneficial to me beyond the acquisition of sexual pleasure as was the case with Alana, as you pointed out, and that was enough for me. As you correctly surmised, you are different. I yearn for you consistently and think I always will. As I said, you are unprecedented. No past partner of mine was ever acquired with the intention of building a lasting relationship so being intimate with regularity for extended periods of time wasn’t even on the table before now. I very much want to do so with you, if that’s what you’re worried about. Trust that I find you extremely desirable.” Hannibal cradled Will’s ass with an ardent hand and nibbled on his bottom lip to demonstrate his point.

“Good.” Will responded, grinding against him and bringing his hands up to hold Hannibal’s shoulders, kissing him hard.

Will kissed and licked down Hannibal’s neck, appreciating the breathy sighs escaping his throat.

“Did you always want me like this? You said you’ve wanted to touch me for a long time.” Will’s voice was muffled as he traveled down Hannibal’s chest, tasting every salty, earthy inch of him. He smelled like rain and smoky wood and citrus, and Will didn’t think he’d ever be able to get enough of it.

“I always found you attractive, yes, but since Jack thrust the patient/therapist dynamic upon us, it would have been unethical to take advantage. And as you know, you quickly began to interest me in much more complex ways. We were beyond sex, in a way.”

“You took plenty of ethical liberties otherwise, Dr. Lecter. I don’t see why you shouldn’t have had your way with me like this too.” Will’s tone was low and lecherous as he nibbled and sucked on Hannibal’s nipples, eyes reverently closed.

“You would have liked that? This is the second mention of it tonight.” Hannibal eyed Will adoringly, clearly delighting in his wanton behavior.

Will looked up at him.

“I know it’s kind of a cliché power dynamic to find sexy, but yeah…I guess I like the idea.”

“I noticed. You keep calling me Dr. Lecter when you’re attempting to be seductive. Perhaps it’s something we should explore at a later date.” Hannibal proposed, an impish twinkle in his eye

Will blushed, withdrawing and turning his head toward the pillow to hide it.

“God, why is this so embarrassing? It’s like I need to say it, but as soon as I do, I feel like I’m an awkward preteen in a sex ed class taught by the gym teacher. And hey,” Will’s head shot up, “what do you mean ‘attempting’?”

“Attempting and succeeding in leaps and bounds, my darling boy.” Hannibal professed, chuckling and snaking an arm around Will’s waist, pressing their bodies back together. To his surprise, Will found himself getting hard again.

“I’m not a boy. Christ, I’m pushing forty.”

“You are to me. You undoubtedly were when you first came to me. A slumped over, withdrawn, twitchy boy who couldn’t look anyone in the eye. It was exhilarating to see you unravel my intentions from the clues I left with me standing right next to you, unaware you were talking to the very person you sought. But I never could have predicted just how brilliant the leaps you were to make would be. Besides, you can hardly argue against this point directly after making the comparison yourself albeit in a different way than I meant. I will refrain from calling you that if you find it patronizing though.”

“No, it’s nice. It…echoes fondness more than anything else.” Will laughed, self-consciousness creeping back in, “Ok, this is getting uncomfortably romantic. We’re literally staring into each other’s eyes right now.”

“Is that a problem?” Hannibal ruffled Will’s hair and pulled him in for a kiss.

“No, I just think I can only take so much at once. It still feels a little weird.”

“Well then let’s turn our attention in a different direction, shall we? It seems your body is insistently telling me it’s ready for that anyway.” Hannibal teased, palming Will’s hardening cock, sending a bone deep shiver through Will’s entire body, “So responsive. I love that about you. I hope it is always that way.”

“Me too.” Will clasped Hannibal’s face in his hands and kissed him, deep and probing. He wanted more, but he didn’t know what exactly. Luckily Hannibal was there to steer the ship and do the thinking for him. He regarded him for a minute, and Will could practically see the gears turning in his head.

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes, I trust you.” And he did. He wasn’t worried right now. Everything Hannibal had done tonight was patient and designed to ease him into this. He knew he wouldn’t push him too far. At least, not tonight.

Hannibal kissed his forehead and rose, heading toward the bathroom.

“Where are you going?”

“To procure the necessary amenities to make this as comfortable as possible.” Hannibal’s voice wafted in from the bathroom, distorted from bouncing off the marble walls. Will could hear him opening and closing a drawer.

“I heavily desire your comfort in this particular situation.” Will noted the emphasis on *particular*, a dark implication that called to mind all the times his comfort had been a sacrifice made for mere amusement. It didn’t slow his resolve like he thought it should, surprised to find that instead it actually excited him, invoking images of Hannibal holding him down while he fucked him, shoving him against the wall and pinning his arms above his head, long fingers clamped around his wrists until they threatened to leave marks. Hannibal emerged from the bathroom and crawled onto the bed on all fours, strong forearms coming to rest on either side of Will’s head. The sight was enthralling, a seductive panther languidly moving toward him. Dangerous and wild and beautiful. Will felt something cold against his shoulder and noticed the small, cylindrical glass bottle in Hannibal’s hand.

“I knew it.” Will giggled.

“What is it this time?” Hannibal rolled his eyes, but he looked entertained nonetheless.

“I knew you wouldn’t have drug store lube. Even your lube has to be ostentatious. Is it French? Please tell me it’s French.” Will taunted, hitching his knees up to nudge Hannibal’s torso just below the ribs.

“It is hardly ostentatious by virtue of not being from a drug store alone. Now kindly dispense with the teasing for a little while, yes?”

“I promise I’ll be good.” It came out more flirtatiously subservient than he had planned, and the look on Hannibal’s face was well worth it. Will knew Hannibal was picturing countless scenarios as a result of that comment, and it made Will acutely aware that Hannibal wasn’t the only one with power here, spiking his confidence. They wanted each other in equal measure.

Hannibal kissed and licked his way down Will’s body, biting and sucking on the tender flesh just above his hipbones. When his tongue met the fold of Will’s thighs and stomach, he gasped, arching his back up off the bed and clutching at the sheets with his fists. He resisted the urge to push Hannibal’s head where he wanted it. Hannibal continued down Will’s thigh, nipping gently and planting feathery kisses. Will realized he was squeezing his eyes shut. Opening them, he lifted his head up to watch. Seeing Hannibal lying between his legs with his hot, wet mouth licking Will like he was all Hannibal ever wanted to taste made him feel feverish all over, his cock twitching on his stomach at the sight.

“I believe you’re sufficiently relaxed now, but if you would indulge me, please take a deep breath and focus on relaxing all the muscles here.” Hannibal placed a firm hand on Will’s lower abdomen.

Will nodded and did as he was told, feeling loose and peaceful. He closed his eyes and stretched his neck back, dreamily aware of the sound of a bottle being opened. Hannibal

wrapped his hand around Will's erection, giving it a few measured tugs. Will knew he was doing it to distract him, but his awareness didn't make it any less successful and when he felt a faintly cold, slick finger rubbing cautious circles on his entrance he only flinched minutely, his hips sinking back into the bed. Any lingering nerves were replaced with eagerness. Hannibal continued to stroke his length while prodding and massaging with the pad of his finger, not pushing inside him yet, allowing him time to acclimate. While he appreciated the delicate way he was being handled, the heat building in him wanted Hannibal to speed up and not be afraid to break him. Will felt his body betray him again, hips rocking towards Hannibal's finger, begging for more. Hannibal obliged, finger slipping in to the first knuckle, moving in and out leisurely.

"Mmm." Will sighed and opened his eyes to look at Hannibal, to let him see the look on his flushed face, see how much Will wanted him to keep going. Hannibal, eyes dark and determined, looked right back and pushed inside Will a little further. It felt better every second, like every nerve in his body was connected to the damp heat Hannibal was pushing into. He groaned, amazed at how easily his body adapted. It wasn't the intrusion he had anticipated, just electricity under his skin, buzzing under the surface like it was pushing him toward something, some unknown release. It wasn't the same as the feeling when he was about to come, familiar rushing heat and heightening ripples radiating from deep in his belly. He thrust onto Hannibal's fingers again, losing nearly all control over his limbs, frenziedly chasing that building release, wanting more.

"Are you trying to tell me something, Will?" Hannibal said smoothly, curling his finger up to massage Will's prostate.

"God…that's…it feels so fucking good." The sensation spiked Will's arousal until he found himself tightening all the muscles in his lower body, hips uncontrollably lifting off the bed. Hannibal gently pressed a hand to Will's stomach, lowering him back down, bidding him to relax.

"Please…Hannibal…"

"Please what, Will?" Hannibal bent down to kiss the inside of Will's thigh, just above the knee.

"I don't know. I don't know what I want."

"I believe you do."

"Mmm…p-please…can you please put another finger inside me?" Will whimpered, smacking the bed with his fist, his body in flames from both the pleasure and the embarrassment of being made to vocalize his desire. It felt positively filthy, but he loved it.

Hannibal withdrew his finger, Will exhaling sharply at the sudden loss. He generously coated his forefinger and middle finger in the lube before entering Will again, harder this time.

"Oh fuck – " Will threw his head back, panting against the pillow, so thoroughly undone. He knew what he must look like right now, sweaty and writhing and moaning like an animal in heat on the sheets, completely surrendering to Hannibal, ready for him to take whatever he

wanted. He knew he would let Hannibal take control and fuck him until he was sore in that moment, but Hannibal wouldn't. Not yet, and Will was grateful for how much care he was taking with this.

Hannibal leaned forward, his lips meeting Will's. They were chest to chest with their erections rubbing together, the friction sending another spark through Will. It was all too much; the two of them pressed so close, mouths locked in a passionate kiss, Hannibal's hand moving fast between them, fucking into Will unrelentingly now, the wet, squelching sounds so pornographic it made Will woozy. He clutched at Hannibal's back ferociously, clinging hard to anchor himself, nails clawing at his shoulders.

Licking and nipping at his ear, Hannibal whispered, "You're being such a good boy for me, Will. Adjusting so quickly, hungrily accepting everything I'm giving you. The sight of you like this…so completely overtaken with pleasure, finally letting go…it's indescribably satisfying. Worth every eternal second we spent apart."

His voice, so deep and intense and full of want, made Will moan and shiver and want so much more.

"Oh god…keep talking. *Please."* He needed to touch Hannibal, give back to him even if it could only be a fraction of the intensity Hannibal himself was capable of delivering onto Will's shuddering frame. He tried to force his body to be still, but it only made him shake that much harder. Reaching between their bodies, now slick with sweat, Will hurriedly pulled down Hannibal's underwear and grasped his cock, giving it a tentative stroke. He marveled at the sensation of touching Hannibal like this, being *allowed* and encouraged to, fingers sliding over the smooth flesh and experimenting with different pacing and pressure to see what Hannibal liked best.

"What shall I tell you? How perfect and smooth and tight you feel around my fingers? Opening up for me just as though you have always been waiting at the ready to receive me, designed for me and no one else? I bet no one else has ever been allowed to touch you like this, have they?"

"No. Only you." Will tightened his grip on Hannibal's erection, breath hitching as Hannibal curved his fingers again, feeling his own orgasm growing ever closer. He knew once Hannibal started touching him again, it would only be a matter of seconds before he lost himself.

"How will it feel when I'm truly inside you, the two of us physically joined together, merged as we already have been in every other conceivable way? Will you be as overwhelmed as you are now, barely able to contain yourself, panting helplessly, crying out in voices you hardly recognize as your own?"

"Yes, god yes. *You know I will.* Touch me. Please.*"*

Hannibal wrapped his hand around Will's cock, and within seconds, he was coming just like he knew he would, spilling hot and urgent all over his stomach and Hannibal's hand, wailing so loudly and suddenly he didn't even have time to stop it. He kept stroking Hannibal, faster and harder every second, desperate to see him ecstatic and moaning in Will's ear. It wasn't

long. Hannibal made a guttural, rumbling groan and came in warm spurts on Will's stomach, both of them a sticky mess now but not caring in the slightest. Carefully withdrawing his fingers, Hannibal brought both of his arms around Will, encircling him so completely, chin nestling in the hollow below his neck.

"Let's get you cleaned up." Hannibal began to disentangle their limbs, reaching for Will's hand to guide him to the bathroom, but he clutched at him pleadingly.

"Not yet. Please. Stay a minute."

"Of course. I was not sure if you could go another round of *staring into each other's eyes* quite so soon." Hannibal smiled and came to rest beside him, pressing a kiss to Will's cheek, a hand absently fondling his mussed curls.

"Mmm, it's appropriate right now."

"We are in perfect agreement."

"You have an unfair face."

"Unfair?" Hannibal quirked an eyebrow.

"Yes. Unfair to everyone else, making the rest of us look like deformed schlubs in comparison."

"I do not believe that to be the case."

"Are you telling me that the very vain, aesthetically obsessed Hannibal Lecter isn't aware of how gorgeous he is? I'm not buying that."

"I have long been aware of the advantageous side of being physically striking, aware of the effect it can have on people, but I wasn't totally aware of it working on you. However, my objection was mostly in reference to the latter part. You are a beautiful creature, Will, and your brightness does not dim in the presence of anyone else despite how you may view yourself. Those plaintive eyes, brimming with everything they have ever seen, hold more rich depth than any I have ever peered into."

"I thought I was a slumped over, twitchy boy?" Will laughed, his fingers brushing Hannibal's hair back from his forehead.

"You once were, yes, but you must know that you have ventured so far from that. Did you not feel it in the way you carried yourself when you first came back to see me? The way your eyes never dithered, your voice commanding and steady, your gait that of the man who has just faced god and walked away the triumphant captain of his own destiny. But even when you were that twitchy boy, there was a raw, unharnessed splendor that I saw plain as day. You were never anything less than lovely to me."

"I feel so…everything is in its right place for once, but it's also overwhelming at the same time. I feel like a raw, stripped nerve in a way…I don't really know how to describe it."

“I know. Take your time, darling Will.” Hannibal leaned forward to kiss him.

“Thanks for being patient with me.” Will felt his eyelids getting heavy, drowsiness catching up with him, ready to take him under any second. He wasn’t sure if he meant patient now or patient always, waiting for years for Will to evolve into his final form and stand victorious behind him, stretched to towering heights.

“Will, as much as I care for you, I cannot permit you to fall asleep in such a state in my bed. I am rather fond of these sheets.” Hannibal nudged him with an elbow to the ribs.

“Ahhh, now there’s the anal retentive Hannibal I know and love.” Will replied hazily, letting himself be led to the bathroom, too tired to worry about what he had just let slip from his lips but dimly aware that he would be overanalyzing and hand-wringing over it furiously in the morning.

They showered quickly, Hannibal washing Will fastidiously as he tried not to fall asleep standing up, mirroring their first night in the house, their first kiss. As they climbed into bed, Will’s mind tipping into that zone just before the advent of sleep where thoughts become indistinguishable from impending dreams, he took a risk, only half aware that he was doing it as slumber overtook him. After all, if he was already destined for a morning of agonizing over unintentional admissions, why not make it completely clear?

“I really do love you, you know. So much I can’t see anything else anymore.” Burrowing into the crook of Hannibal’s arm, he didn’t wait for a response, drifted into a dream filled rest and didn’t stir again until morning. He dreamt he was back on his boat, sailing across the Atlantic in brilliant daylight with the heavy sea salt air whipping at his face, but he wasn’t alone this time. Hannibal was reclining on deck, hair shining in the sun and wearing a loose, cream-colored linen suit, feet sockless in his loafers, looking more carefree than Will had ever seen him. Will undressed them both, and they made love on the deck, sleeping under the expansive, pitch black sky, floating across the steadily lapping ocean, no one and nothing in their path for miles. Free to be together without having to face the outside world.

When Will woke early the next morning, for once Hannibal was still tucked underneath him, chest rising and falling in a hypnotic rhythm that threatened to lull Will back to sleep. He smiled and kissed his lover’s forehead, cheeks, eyelids, the corners of his mouth like a prayer. *I love you. I love you, and I won’t let them take you away from me again.*

Chapter End Notes

I was pretty self-conscious about handling the sexy bits, but after a few rereads and edits, I'm actually pretty happy with how this turned out. I'm still not sure how many chapters this will be in the end, but I'm a few pages into chapter 4 as of now. More smut and more Hannibal and Will hashing out the terms of their relationship to come. :) Writing these two is a lot of fun so far.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will calls Hanni out on his shit, and they figure out a few details about their relationship. With sexytimes sandwiched in-between their conversations. :)

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to all of you who have left kudos and comments so far. It seriously makes my day and makes me grin so hard it hurts. :) Special thanks again to Effisaurus for beta reading. I had reread this one so much my eyes were starting to cross, and I was worried I couldn't distinguish between what was good or horrible anymore so it was very helpful to have a fresh pair of eyes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

More exhausted than he realized, Will drifted back to sleep and woke up for good when the sun was high in the sky, the bedroom illuminated in a harsh, white glow. He woke with his head on Hannibal's chest and one of Hannibal's hands around his shoulder while he held a book, Le Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine by Alexandre Dumas (in the original French, naturally), in the other. Raising his head groggily, Will stretched, making tiny groans at the injustice of the blinding morning light.

“You’re still here.” Will shifted to a sitting position, back resting against the mahogany headboard.

“You believe I would flee under the cover of night like a common thief? I thought it had been well established that there is no place I would rather be.” Hannibal placed his book on the nightstand and turned to face Will, looking like a devil in angel’s clothing, the fine angles of his face backlit from the mid-morning sun.

“No, it’s just that you’re usually downstairs and cooking already by the time I wake up. I’m half convinced that you don’t really sleep, just power down for an electrical recharge for a couple of hours a day like a robot.”

“I assure you there are no input ports or hidden control panels on my person. I am all flesh and bone, no circuitry to be found. Although you may complete a thorough search if you like. I certainly would not stop you in your endeavor.” Hannibal smirked, moving his arms to rest behind his head, stretching out long and lithe and inviting.

Will laughed and ran a hand over his face.

“I really have to get used to this whole flirting out in the open instead of through cleverly coded philosophical speeches thing.”

“Ah, so you admit to being party to a mutual flirtation then?”

“No, *you* flirted. I was the seduced, not the seducer…Well, not in a genuine way anyway.” Will added quietly, reliving all of the events leading up to Hannibal’s escape to Europe, the calculated, long con he had formulated with Jack Crawford.

“I suspect from your defeated tone that I don’t need to remind you that your seduction veered squarely into genuine territory by the end of it, the only remaining deception being one to yourself.”

Will sank down in the bed, head abruptly spinning with all the conversations yet to be had, the negotiations he knew would have to come to pass sooner or later. Letting out a deeply pained sigh, he turned to Hannibal.

“We should probably…talk about some things.”

“Yes, but there is no need to rush headlong into the foray on empty stomachs only moments after waking.”

Will eyed him skeptically.

“You’re afraid, aren’t you? You actually are.”

“I’m not sure what you mean. You will have to elaborate.” Hannibal stared back blankly, unblinking.

“All of this talk about giving me time and space and letting me come to my own realizations without pressure and manipulation…it isn’t just about being considerate, is it? You’re procrastinating. You aren’t in any rush to have those conversations because you aren’t totally sure you’ll want to hear what I decide. You’re scared the terms won’t be to your liking.”

“I will admit to harboring some reservations, but I was not being duplicitous when expressing my wish for you to take your time. The last thing I want is to press and prod, goading you into commitments before you have realized exactly what it is you are committing to.”

“I think that just proves my point. You think if you push too hard, I’ll run away. Don’t you?”

Hannibal turned away, gazing a bit forlornly out the window behind the night stand.

“Well, one could hardly blame me, given how past events have unfolded. It is definitely not out of the realm of possibility, is it?”

“Hannibal, I told you I wasn’t going to change my mind about being here. And, if you recall, it was *you* who gave *me* that mini lecture on the dangers of holding onto the past.” Will reached for Hannibal’s hand, bringing it to his lips to plant a placating kiss.

“Yes, I expect I would do well to heed my own advice, wouldn’t I?” He turned back to Will, his expression softened now.

“Come here.”

Hannibal slid over, arms reaching out to envelope Will, the two of them migrating back down the bed to recline.

“If you want, we can start with me being the one in the mortified position.”

“And how do you propose we do that?” He brushed a few gentle kisses over Will’s lips and cheeks.

“Well, we could always talk about how I told you I loved you for the first time and immediately fell asleep so I didn’t have to deal with the aftermath. I think it’s safe to say I might have *partly* done that on purpose.”

“You feared it would not garner the desired response?”

“Yes. I didn’t know if you were really capable.”

“Why? Because I’m some as yet undefined version of a psychopath? I mustn’t be capable of love?” Hannibal was all ice and stone, very obviously insulted by the insinuation, and his every sinewy muscle tightened in a second. That chilling, seething anger packaged in a cool, detached exterior was always far more intimidating than the belligerence most other people exhibited, but Will was determined to be as honest as possible regardless of the consequences. It was important to talk about this.

“Well…yes. Maybe. And to be fair, you yourself said that you used to think you weren’t capable of this.”

“Not capable of forming a connection and bond on this profound of a level, yes, but I never implied that I was completely devoid of the aptitude for love. It is true that I have much more discretion than most people in choosing how emotive I am at any given point in time, but exhibiting more than a modicum of control and not being a slave to one’s own whims and sudden moods does not equate with being a callous, inhuman thing. And I highly resent the suggestion, particularly since I thought I had made it abundantly clear how I felt when you relayed your conversation with Bedelia to me.” Hannibal withdrew from their embrace, rolling onto his back.

“No, actually you used the same trick she did. You didn’t respond so much as turn the focus back to me by asking if I ached for you.” Will rubbed his eyes, frustrated and shocked to see Hannibal so resentful so fast, such a sharp contrast from the tenderness of the past few days. Although he knew he could hurt him like that, it was always bewildering to witness, like seeing an extinct creature from eons ago rise from the dirt and live again, blood pumping back into its dead limbs as though it had never been gone. He knew it wasn’t something just anyone could accomplish. Hannibal didn’t care that much for many people and maybe didn’t care that much for anyone other than Will. Maybe never even had. Still, Will ached for a final

affirmation. Plain words regardless of how much less important than actions Hannibal thought they were.

“And I told you later that same day that Bedelia was right to quote Dante to you.”

Will sighed and rolled his eyes.

“What is it you would like me to say, Will? A mawkish speech dripping with trite romantic utterances is not going to appease you right now nor would I imagine it to be much to your taste in general, and when you have already formulated an image of me as someone cold and devoid of the endemic human emotions that naturally occur –”

“God, Hannibal! Stop. You know, for someone who loves to stress how much I need to accept my true self and be honest about who I am, you aren’t very forthcoming about your own feelings. Everything is filtered through metaphors and complicated verbiage, analogies, just ANYTHING but direct communication. Can you just cut the shit this time, and tell your…” Will struggled for the right word, one that wouldn’t create a questioning or wincing response in either of them. Partner? Lover? Nothing sounded quite right, “…tell me how you feel about me? After all this time, is it so hard? I don’t care if you think it’s some stupid and childish Hallmark card thing normal people do that you’re above. I need to hear it and preferably not masked under purple prose just this once.”

Hannibal didn’t say anything for a minute, the deafening silence throbbing in Will’s ears. It was as if every chirp of a bird outside, every rustle of leaves in the wind, was elevated several decibels until they were more like nails on a chalkboard than the pacifying sounds of nature. He was incredibly anxious about what would happen next. Would Hannibal storm out? Make a cutting remark that sliced right through Will like a scythe, leaving his heart on the floor in pieces as only Hannibal so artfully could? Suddenly, Will felt panicked. Maybe he shouldn’t have said that. Maybe he just risked their happiness. Did he just ruin the entire relationship? *God, just say something. Please.* He took a deep breath. He didn’t really want to take it back even though waiting for a response was torture. It would do neither of them any good for Will to stuff this down and pretend it didn’t matter to him as much as it did. He couldn’t lie to himself like that, and he was sure Hannibal wouldn’t want him to anyway. If he didn’t address this, he would be walking around with a gaping hole inside himself, stretching ever wider until he snapped like a rubber band.

Taking both of Will’s hands in his, Hannibal looked up at him with moist eyes.

“I love you. I love you more than I have ever loved anyone. But such a simple, empty expression so often used by people carelessly as a perfunctory response is not sufficient by any stretch of the imagination. It is an expression which is given weight simply because we are told by social convention that it carries it and do not question that premise. And as far as my 'purple prose', you must not mistake my verbal embellishments for insincerity. My specific vernacular is part of my nature and personality as much as yours is, and I assure you that you should not be operating under any assumptions that I am playing mind games with you. There is no need for games between us anymore. Anyone can say they love you, Will. It doesn't necessarily mean anything depending on the source. You are correct that I don’t consider it my preferred method of proving my love to you. I prefer to *show* you in all the

myriad ways I can: showing you the world, giving you everything of which you have ever dreamed, allowing you to see the true me, the parts I have not shared with anyone else."

Hannibal looked away, and Will could see his Adam's apple bobbing up and down. He silently wondered if it was hard for Hannibal to tell him this, to let his veneer slip. When he spoke again, he still didn't turn back to look at Will.

"I surrendered to Jack because the pain of never seeing you again and knowing that you no longer cared to seek me out rendered the concept of freedom meaningless. I admitted to you recently that I am not always certain when it comes to you. I was not certain you would come back to me. And after three years, I was even less certain, yet I never regretted my decision, and I never stopped waiting for you because there was no longer anything the outside world could offer me that I would have wanted to experience without you."

Hannibal remained silent, waiting for Will's cue.

"Hannibal…I…thank you. I love you. And I wasn't trying to make a judgment about what you can and can't do or presuming to know that's something I have the power to determine for sure. I just…I don't know…you're still mysterious in many ways, and I'm sure you always will be to some extent no matter how much you let me behind the veil. Bedelia's word choice as well, by the way. And I don't mistake the way you talk for insincerity, but it's like our conversation about food. Different words for different purposes. Sometimes it gets a little lost in translation, and I need something simple that I can easily grab and hold onto. I needed some reassurance and I'm sure I will again from time to time, like anyone does in any relationship, but especially in this one given that the amount of baggage between the two of us is enough to fill every major international airport in the country."

Hannibal surprised Will by laughing in a much less restrained way than Will had ever heard from him. Free and sincere. It made Will laugh in response, and then they were both chuckling, looking at each other as if to acknowledge "we're a couple of hopeless idiots, aren't we?"

"I apologize for my earlier remarks, Will. It was very childish and impulsive of me to be so quickly offended. I knew you were in need of conciliation, but I chose to administer shallow verbal cuts instead."

"Well, I'm sure it didn't feel good to hear that I thought you might not be able to love. But I really didn't mean it like it sounded, honestly. I don't really think of you like that. I just needed some clarity."

"I know." Hannibal scooted in closer and began to stroke Will's chest.

Will leaned his head back and felt his eyes welling up, a tidal wave of emotion sweeping over him and crashing down before he had time to process it. Why did he feel like this? It came on without any warning. He covered his eyes with his forearm and tried to control his breathing to ward off the tears before Hannibal could notice, but he recognized the stuttering, choppy rhythm of Will's breathing, the erratic bouncing of his chest as he tried to suppress the sobs.

"Will, look at me." Hannibal pried Will's arm away and took his face in his hands.

“Hannibal, I –” Will felt the burning sting of hot tears in the corners of his eyes, running down his cheeks in rivulets every time he blinked, his body reacting before he could even register the emotions he was experiencing.

“It’s alright, Will. I’m here. I’m not upset with you. This was hardly an argument.” Hannibal pulled Will to him and held him so tightly it almost hurt, soothing fingers tangling in his hair as his other hand rubbed his back.

“It’s not that…I…I’m so sorry, Hannibal. I’m so sorry I didn’t go with you. We should have left together. If we had, you never would have had to give yourself up. I should have been with you in Florence. Not Bedelia. I knew it. I knew it was the right thing, but I fought against it, convinced myself everyone else was right and I don’t know how I’m ever going to forgive myself for that, all those wasted years we could have been together. And now it’s going to be that much harder for us to slip away from all this – ”

“Will, we’re together now. Please do not torture yourself with what could have been. I am ultimately grateful for everything that came to pass because it did bring you back to me eventually. And if we are together for twenty, thirty, forty more years from this day, it will never be enough. I am as wholly consumed by you as you are by me, and I will never stop yearning for you. Perhaps if we had gone to Europe together, you would not have been ready. Your becoming was not yet complete then; there were many aspects of yourself with which you had not reconciled. The denial of the darkness coursing within you was still strong. Perhaps you would have wavered and regressed, horrified by the choice you made, resenting me and withdrawing forever. It may not have been the right time and place for us to be together then. While we will never know for sure, I am fully confident that the person I see before me now is not the same man who betrayed me, and without those years apart, maybe he never would have arisen into existence. Things are exactly as they should be.”

Will kissed him, fierce and unskilled, in a rush to show him how much he cared. Hannibal was right, words weren’t enough. Not even close. Hooking his leg around Hannibal’s waist, he rolled them both until Hannibal was on top of him. Will dragged his lips over every part of Hannibal he could reach, cheeks, ears, neck, chest, tenderly biting and licking. Hannibal groaned as Will started sucking on his neck.

“Perhaps we should engage in lover’s quarrels more often.” Hannibal pulled Will’s head back, words swallowed by skin as he kissed down Will’s chest.

“You know you don’t need to start an argument to have this.”

Hannibal looked up at Will. In a rare moment of vulnerability, his expression was completely transparent, and Will could see how grateful Hannibal was for the validity of that statement. He could have Will like this whenever he wanted, didn’t have to worry about being rejected or cast aside anymore, both of them finally on the same page about their affection for each other.

“Can you lie on your back for me?” Will was struck with the urge to return the favor of last night, to take care of Hannibal with finesse equal to that which he had been given. Or at least to try his very best.

Hannibal cocked an eyebrow expectantly, eager to see what Will had in mind, and obeyed. Will lingered on his side for a minute, taking in the beautiful sight of Hannibal's finely formed muscles and bones, learning every curvature, dip, and scar, some of which belonged to him, some to Jack, some stemming from unknown battles Will hoped to learn about someday.

Taking Hannibal's face in his hands, Will kissed him slow and deep, brushing his lips down to his ear.

"You look *so good*. I want to taste every part of you." He whispered, luxuriating in the way Hannibal's breath hitched, a barely audible groan making its way out of his slightly parted lips from deep in his throat.

"You have me laid out before you like a feast and permission to devour until you are sated. What cause is there for delay?"

"Patience, Dr. Lecter. We wouldn't want to rush a thing like this, now would we?" Will grinned libidinously. He couldn't recall a time when he had ever felt this sexually free, no inhibitions to be found, no confusion about his desires and needs. His previous sexual history was lackluster. Most encounters had left him feeling empty, the lack of connection and inability to shut off the whirlwind of thoughts and empathic signals rendering him incapable of relaxing and yielding to the sensations. Being with Molly had been safe and clean, almost sterile with normalcy. At the time, it was just what he needed to distract himself from the ever growing chasm inside him, and he was surprised at how easily he concealed himself. In some ways, he was never more like Hannibal than he had been in those years, expertly cloaking himself in a painstakingly crafted person suit the way he had seen Hannibal do time and time again. After a while, he almost believed he could change who he was, almost believed that he could pass the rest of his days like that until everything he had learned about himself under Hannibal's tutelage was a distant memory.

But as soon as he walked into that room in the BSHCI and saw Hannibal behind the glass, the shroud dropped like a snake's skin and Will stepped aside, shaking the final flaky remnants from his feet. With Hannibal, touching felt like communion, the noise in his head replaced by the beauty and intensity of everything they had shared, every bit of love they had for each other. They were nearly indistinguishable, Will getting lost in where he began and where Hannibal ended. Every sigh, every caress, every moan that came from Will was as much Hannibal's as it was his own.

"What a remarkable display of assertiveness this morning. And in both matters of the mind and body nonetheless. You will never cease to amaze me, will you?"

"I sincerely hope not. People who bore you generally have expiration dates." Will let out a little moan, already so aroused just from looking at Hannibal and thinking about the possible ways to proceed, so many tantalizing options running through his mind.

"I should think you are well aware by now that I vastly prefer you alive."

Will ran his tongue along the length of Hannibal's neck, scraping his teeth lightly before biting down, increasing pressure until Hannibal groaned and clutched at Will's shoulder

blade.

“Mmm, seems like you like that.” He traveled down Hannibal’s chest with soft kisses and teasing bites.

“My, what formidable deductive skills you possess.”

“Hey now. Sarcasm is pretty bad bedroom etiquette.”

“I guess you will have to devise some auspicious methods of silencing me then, won’t you?”

Will’s cock stirred in response, all the blood rushing down, his skin ablaze and pulsing. He kept working his way down Hannibal’s body, leaving a hot, wet trail as he inched closer to his erection. Hannibal didn’t buck his hips and squirm like Will would. Except for a few small, breathy sighs, he remained collected as ever, patiently waiting to see what Will would do next. When his mouth reached the crease of Hannibal’s upper thigh, he stopped.

“Ok, so here’s the thing. I really want to do this, but I’m almost 100% sure I’m going to be woefully bad at it.”

Will lifted his head and was greeted with Hannibal looking altogether too pleased with himself.

“Could you maybe try to look a little less smug?”

“I am sorry to be inwardly laughing at your expense, but you must admit, it is a rather amusing scenario. You reduced to a fumbling, inexperienced teenager despite being a grown man of nearly forty. I must reiterate that you are such a boy sometimes.”

“Ugh, can we just fast forward to a couple weeks from now where we’re accustomed to each other’s bodies, and I don’t need help figuring out how to give a blowjob?” Will buried his blushing face into Hannibal’s stomach, his ears burning with awkwardness. He was cringing at his own word choice, but “oral” had felt much too clinical.

“I would not dream of it. Every step of you settling further into your true skin, distending and shaping the hide as you find the form which is most befitting and tailored to you like a glove, is a splendid thing to behold. It is a one of a kind experience full of firsts which can never be repeated, and I wish to keenly observe and remember every stage of it. It would be criminal to omit any part of that by skipping ahead.” He stroked Will’s hair and tipped his chin up meet his gaze.

“Building a wing of your memory palace for Will Graham’s delayed sexual maturation?” Will looked back at Hannibal lovingly. Once again, he knew just what to say to ease Will’s anxiety.

“Will Graham’s many evolutions and experiences already occupy several wings of my memory palace. This is merely an expansion and one to which I greatly look forward. Now, as for your current dilemma, I believe I can be of some assistance. Would you like me to

demonstrate for you?" Hannibal's voice dipped lower as he asked the question, so suggestive it made Will's cock ache.

Not waiting for a response (like Will was going to say no anyway), Hannibal pulled Will up from under the arms and rolled him onto his back as though he weighed next to nothing. Will's breath sped up, exhilarated by that small display of strength, thoughts rapid firing with all the ways he knew that power could be used to please him like no other lover had ever been able to. He was anxious to see Hannibal's mouth on his cock but was half afraid he would come just from the sight of it.

"Please be aware that if I catch you closing your eyes and drowning in the sensation, I will stop. There will be time for that, but right now I want you to watch and learn."

Will felt positively dizzy with desire. He briefly considered closing his eyes just to toy with Hannibal, curious to see what arousing punishment he would dole out for being disobeyed. He nodded to signify that he understood and sharply inhaled as he watched Hannibal sink down between his legs. Hannibal began by kissing the skin surrounding Will's erection, tongue darting out occasionally in quick, short laps. Wrapping a hand loosely around the hard length, he started from the base and licked his way up in staccato strokes, savoring every taste of Will. When he reached the top, he put his mouth around the head, tongue swirling around it while he moved his hand up and down the shaft. Will was fighting to keep his eyes open, and Hannibal had only just begun. He trained all of his focus on leaning his head forward, resisting the urge to throw it back on the pillow and cry out in pleasure. His resolve was tested again when Hannibal started to suck on the head, his mouth making irresistibly erotic puckering sounds every couple seconds.

"Fuck…that feels great." Will couldn't help it. Stifling his moans and focusing on learning all the movements Hannibal was showing him was becoming more difficult with every passing second.

Hannibal looked up to make sure Will was still watching before opening his mouth wider and moving it halfway down Will's cock. A loud moan escaped Will's mouth as he strained to keep observing, noting the way Hannibal curved his lips inward to coat Will's dick and shield his teeth, making for a perfectly smooth wet heat as he moved up and down. Hannibal reached a hand down to gently cradle Will's balls, moving them around in his hand in a careful, circular motion, aware of how to be delicate but still stimulate in a way that heightened everything Will was feeling. Without warning, Hannibal sank all the way down, devouring the entirety of him, his nose nudging against Will's pubic hair. He could feel his cock rubbing against the back of Hannibal's throat and thought he might faint from how overwhelming it was.

"Oh god, that's...you have to stop or I'm going to come." Will was fighting so hard to ignore the urge to put his hands in Hannibal's hair and hold him in place that he had to bite down on the fleshy part of his hand between the thumb and palm, his other hand clutching a fistful of sheets.

Hannibal slowly drew his mouth up the length of Will's cock, eyes open and seductively piercing through him the entire time. He gave one last long lick on the underside and rose up to press his body against Will's, sinewy forearms caging his head as he quickly kissed him.

"As much as I would love to continue until I can confirm how sweet you undeniably will taste, I think it is best to see what you can do while it is still fresh in your mind, wouldn't you agree?" Hannibal whispered, dragging his lips across Will's jawline and over the outer curve of his ear.

"Yes." Will choked out hoarsely, panting so hard he sounded more like he'd been running for hours than just lying there moaning.

Hannibal shifted onto his back and twined his arms behind his head. He looked smug and expectant and instead of pissing him off, it only made Will more excited. He wanted so badly to please him, to make him lose himself in his orgasm and grasp Will so hard it hurt, hold him down and take what he wanted. Will was slowly developing an awareness that he had a dormant submissive tendency that was blossoming around Hannibal, a reality he had no doubt Hannibal had been cognizant of for a long time. Now that he was no longer blocking them out, most of the fantasies that flickered across his mind involved relinquishing control to Hannibal and being told what to do.

Will settled between Hannibal's legs and took a deep breath. Knowing where to start helped, but he was still nervous, so desperate to make him feel good. Following Hannibal's example, he licked his way up the shaft, alternating between the quick laps he had shown him and licking the length in one long stroke from base to tip.

"Very good, Will. I knew you would be able to build and improvise. Enthusiasm is sometimes a perfect substitute for skill in times like these, and you are very enthusiastic about pleasing me, aren't you?"

Will sighed contentedly, overcome by the newness of this, the weight of Hannibal’s erection on his tongue, warm and smooth. Taking the head in his mouth, he tasted the few drops of precome that had collected there. It was both salty and sweet, and Will was a little alarmed to discover how much he liked it, how much he wanted to taste more, to truly learn every taste of Hannibal like he had admitted only minutes ago. Saying it and actually experiencing it was another thing entirely. He was painfully turned on, moaning around Hannibal’s cock as he sucked on the head, his face flushed. Pulling back to take a breath, he looked up at Hannibal, eyes shyly half-lidded.

“Are you alright, Will?” Hannibal wove his fingers through Will’s hair soothingly.

“Yeah, I’m fine. More than fine actually.” He smiled and kissed his way up the hard length. Will took Hannibal into his mouth, sliding down halfway, careful to curl his lips in slightly like he had seen Hannibal do. Hannibal moaned and tightened his fingers in Will’s hair, gripping at the root in a way Will was figuring out he really, really liked. He started to bob up and down, firmly stroking the rest of the shaft with his hand. It was such an unfamiliar sensation but something about the fullness of it was exhilarating. He dipped down further, trying to fill his mouth with as much of Hannibal as possible and experimenting with broad, flat strokes of his tongue on the underside and quick flicks of the tip of his tongue over the head. Hannibal was leaking even more now, and Will greedily lapped it up.

“You really are doing so well, Will. Such a good boy for me. You like taking direction, don’t you? Like letting me in your head so you don’t have to think for a while, yes? You can drown

out all the persistent voices and just exist here in this moment with me, focused on gratifying me exactly how I tell you."

Will answered by grabbing Hannibal's ass with both hands and gliding his mouth down his cock as far as he could manage. He couldn't swallow him down all the way as Hannibal had done to him, but the groans Hannibal made let Will know it was plenty. He sped up, encouraged by how Hannibal tensed beneath him, stomach and thighs taut as his breath came quicker every second. Will could tell he was close, could feel how he somehow got even harder, could feel the urgency radiating off him.

Will opened his eyes so he could watch. Hannibal gripped the back of Will's neck, holding him in place but not pushing down, and came with a growl, head thrown back on the pillow, lovely throat bared. Will didn't think he'd ever seen anything more beautiful in his life. The late morning sun glinted off the fine sheen of sweat on Hannibal's skin, his cheeks tinted pink from arousal, eyes closed in bliss. He swallowed Hannibal's release. It was slightly more bitter than the taste Will had gotten before but still that combination of salty and sweet that Will found he didn't mind at all. Just the fact that it was Hannibal's taste excited him.

Deliriously drunk with accomplishment and the thrill of venturing into the unknown, Will climbed up to meet Hannibal, kissing him and settling his head into the crook of his arm.

"You came in my mouth." Will laughed a little, eyes dreamily at half-mast.

"I'm sorry. We should have discussed – "

"No, no, I didn't mean it like that. I just…it's not something I ever thought I'd do…*want* to do…let alone end up liking."

"Are you concerned with how you identify sexually now?" Hannibal ran his hand up and down Will's upper arm and gave his shoulder a squeeze.

"No. I've never been too concerned with labels, especially as someone who has so consistently defied classification every time someone has tried to apply it. Everything in the human experience is on a spectrum with endless gradients of color. People like to pretend there are nice, neat little boxes and just a few primary colors to choose from. It makes the idiots feel safe, but it's far from being true."

"I wholeheartedly agree."

"And I think it goes without saying that any hesitancy I've experienced about my sexual feelings for you had less to do with sex and more to do with everything else between us. However, if forced in a gun-to-head situation, I would probably say I'm Hannibal-sexual at this point." Will said with a mischievous smile.

"Silly boy." Hannibal laughed and ruffled Will's hair.

"I don't think I've ever seen you laugh and smile this much. At least not genuinely."

“Well, I am extremely happy. I have been given that which I longed for so sharply. Naturally, it shows.” Hannibal brought his forehead to rest on Will’s. Will could feel his breath ghosting across his lips.

“Don’t leave me, Hannibal.” Will didn’t know where it had come from. Thoughts were dropping from his brain onto his tongue with such ease these days. He didn’t seem to be able to halt and detour the process as much anymore, no filtering through a Rube Goldbergian complex machine to manipulate and save himself from the end result. Everything just dropped down pure and unmitigated, and while he was grateful to have everything out in the open and dealt with rather than hidden away and squelched down, it still made him feel incredibly naked and unprotected. He didn’t want to seem needy, but he grabbed at Hannibal’s back and shoulders all the same as though a fervent grip would not only physically keep him there in the moment but keep him there forever as well.

“Is that something you fear?” Hannibal leaned back to look at Will, cupping his cheek with his palm.

“No…yes…sometimes. What if we disagree about how you want to…go about slaking your urges so to speak? You’ve never had to consult another person on things like that. You’ve always been able to just do as you pleased. I know you want me. I know you want to share our lives; I don’t question that. But…those lives are going to be full of compromise. I do wonder how that’s going to play out. You’ve killed people for much more minor infractions than things I’ve already done and – ”

“Wouldn’t you being alive and well right now signify that I already have quite different standards for you than I have had of others in the past? How did you put it? That your epitaph would have ‘unspeakably rude’ on it by now if you were anyone else?”

“Yeah…true. You did try to eat my brain though.”

“Yes, I was feeling rather impetuous at the time. I have a very short list of regrets in this life, but that unfortunate occurrence remains in the top position of the miniscule pyramid.”

Will didn’t say anything. He absently wondered if anyone else had ever been on the receiving end of a sincere regret from Hannibal. It was most definitely a rare gift. His eyes traced the hollow between Hannibal’s collarbone and neck, afraid to meet his gaze.

“How long before you’re feeling impetuous again?” It was barely above a whisper. He wasn’t completely sure that he hadn’t said it only in his head.

“Will,” Hannibal lifted Will’s chin, “I’m not going to entertain the idea of murdering you at the manifestation of every couple’s squabble we may have, if that is what you are asking. What exists between us in unparalleled, and all the rules that have governed my contact and interactions with the previous people in my life do not apply here. That includes previous versions of yourself. And you would do well to remember that I am more prone to meticulous planning than I am to reckless impulsivity.”

“Yeah, I guess that was a stupid thing to ask. I’m sorry. I feel like I’m overdosing on a need for validation today.”

Will tried to bury his face in Hannibal's neck, but Hannibal pulled back and lifted his face again to look at him.

"I understand that while our union has been many years in the making, the consummation of it in an open, honest way is so new that this relationship is, in actuality, in its infancy. I do not feel exasperated by your need for confirmation of the mechanics of how this will work. In fact, I would be rather worried if you were glossing over those aspects in favor of blindly forging ahead. It wouldn't be very Will Graham and it also would be careless and ill-advised in my opinion. This is no light-hearted matter. I am sorry if my hair trigger offensive reaction this morning has discouraged you from wading into the deeper waters of negotiation."

"No, it hasn't. It's just a lot at once so I don't want you to feel like it's…an onslaught. So… you WILL talk things over with me when you…" Will swallowed hard. What he was about to acknowledge was gargantuan, and although he had accepted it, he still felt a little light-headed finally saying it out loud, "choose someone to kill? You won't just go ahead without telling me?"

"Of course not. When I said this is all I ever wanted for you, for both of us, I meant it completely. I do not wish to act alone unless that is what you want, which it may be depending on the circumstances which I am sure will greatly vary with every situation. Your level of participation needn't be the same with every conquest, but I would never leave you in the dark. Will…" Hannibal was nearly breathless. He petted Will's cheek with his thumb and looked into his eyes with complete devotion, "You are progressing so quickly. I am tempted to pinch my flesh until it bleeds to make sure that I am not dreaming. Thank you. I greatly appreciate how forthright you have been these past few days. It shows me that you truly are ready and have given this the appropriate level of thought and are continuing to do so at every turn."

Will smiled up at Hannibal and pulled him in for a lazy kiss.

"I promise you're not dreaming. Unless of course this is a shared hallucination, in which case may we never, ever jolt back to reality. But…as far as my participation level is concerned… are you saying that I have…what exactly? Room to maneuver? You've spent so long trying to get me to arrive at this point of recognition. I guess I'm a little stunned to hear you be lax about what that means?"

"You are not my mirror image nor would I wish you to be. You follow your own nature. As you once said, you cannot be reduced to a set of influences. Regardless of what seeds have been sown and by whom, you are a product of yourself and yourself alone. To say otherwise would be to cheapen the significance of your metamorphosis and rob you of your sovereignty. The dance between us will not always be exactly as it was with the Red Dragon, but we shall find our steps in time, adjusting to the tempo and lilt of the melody as it washes over us like a composition infiltrating the mind of a great pianist. I do not worry about the rhythm stumbling or the notes falling out of pitch. Mistakes are necessary when one is perfecting one's craft, and just as the pianist does not set flame to his sheet music when confronted with the first impasse, I would ask that you approach the honing of your predatory instincts in the same manner. That is to say, we will figure it out, and we will tackle it together every step of the way."

“Thank you. It’s good to hear that. Not to change the subject to another kind of frankness, but um…before I lose my nerve and go back to being a blushing, embarrassed mess, I’d like to… suggest something.”

Hannibal nodded, indicating for Will to continue.

“Next time I go down on you, um…” Will shrank into himself, still not super self-assured when it came to talking about his sexual preferences. He took a deep breath, “could we maybe try you kind of…taking over?”

A devious grin spread across Hannibal’s moist lips. He looked so erotically delighted and a little shocked.

“Oh, Will…I never could have predicted how quickly you would discover this side of yourself. It really is as though the proverbial floodgates have opened, isn’t it?” He pressed reverent kisses to Will’s temples, cheeks, eyelids, lips.

“Yeah, it really is. It feels fucking absurd.” Will laughed.

“You would let me thrust into your mouth and take my fill? Sacrifice your comfort in order to use you to obtain my pleasure?” Hannibal whispered, tongue darting out to trace the curves of Will’s ear.

“Yes. *God, yes*. I must be out of my fucking mind.”

“No, it just appears that in addition to the other urges you have begun to cultivate, there are still more aspects of yourself that you have long ignored and denied.”

“But you already knew that, didn’t you?” Will pulled back and ran his fingers through Hannibal’s hair.

“I suspected as much, yes. Such a dizzying, overpowering intellect requires extra measures to become quiet and still. Relinquishing control can do that. And, as I’m sure you are aware by now, you have made some rather obvious hints at such things: proclivities for calling me doctor and reveling in my praise when I tell you what a good boy you are, for example. Such a shame that you’ve been living a dull sexual life up until now. What a pitiful missed opportunity to have had you all to oneself and not taken advantage of pushing your limits and giving your body the ecstasy it craves until it trembles and threatens to break apart.”

Even though he didn’t expressly say it, Will knew he was talking about Molly.

“Do I detect a note of jealousy, Hannibal?”

Hannibal only huffed in response.

“Oh come on…all that we’ve shared so far, and you can’t admit jealousy? I can. I’m extremely jealous and resentful of Bedelia. So much so that I’d like to eat her fucking leg while she’s still alive in the trademark Hannibal fashion if I’m going to be really, really honest. She got to be with you in Italy in my rightful place, and she didn’t even begin to appreciate the significance of that.”

Hannibal smirked at that.

“Well, you may derive some perverse pleasure out of knowing that she was shaking like a leaf in terror for much of our tenure in Florence. She was not an entirely willing party by any connotation of the phrase.”

“Did you…were you like this?”

“No, we shared minimal intimacies, but nothing like this. By contrast, I’m sure you and… your wife experienced a whole spectrum of pleasures together.” Will detected a little possessiveness in Hannibal’s tone.

“You ARE jealous.”

“I will say that I did not feel it was a remotely suitable situation for you. When you were with *her*,” Hannibal’s inflection on *her* dripped with such disdain and try as he might, Will couldn’t muster any sympathy for the target of that contempt. In its place, Will only felt pride at how Hannibal cared enough to envy a woman he had never met for occupying an intimate place in Will’s life at a time when he himself was not allowed to do so, “you were not thriving but merely surviving instead. Your greatness was unrecognized, unappreciated. You were neutered and locked up in an antiseptic environment where everything was encouraged to die rather than be fostered. Mediocrity was supported and praised when it should have been shunned for someone so extraordinary as yourself. To see someone stifle you into accepting such a fate…it wouldn’t do.”

“So you sent Dolarhyde to kill her. That epitomizes jealous lover behavior, don’t you think?”

“You don’t seem too terribly bothered by that.” Hannibal tilted his head in that unsettlingly distant observational way he had.

“Not nearly as much as I should be, no.”

The left side of Hannibal’s mouth quirked up in a half smile, and he wrapped his hand around the back of Will’s neck, pulling him into a kiss.

“It seems that your keenness to discuss more serious matters detracted attention away from me tending to you properly.” Hannibal rasped, palming Will’s cock. Will was surprised to find that he was still hard.

“That’s ok.”

“No, it most certainly is not. Especially when you have more than earned it today. You were so very good for me, my beautiful boy.” Hannibal’s voice sent shivers up and down Will’s spine. Hearing those words sent Will’s eyes rolling back into his head, a low moan leaving his mouth.

“Please never stop calling me that.”

“How could I when it elicits such shuddering moans? I wish you could see how lovely you look right now, Will. See yourself through my eyes. You are absolutely breathtaking.”

Hannibal began to descend, warm mouth making its way down Will's slim torso, but Will lightly pushed him away.

"Don't. Come back up here. I want you close."

"As you wish, my love." Hannibal complied, settling one arm underneath Will to rest around the back of his shoulders. Reaching down with his free hand, he began to stroke to Will's erection with a firm hand, kissing along Will's shoulder and neck.

Will grasped Hannibal's face in his hands and brought him back up to look at him.

"I want to look at you."

"Your chrysalis has completely crumbled in rotting fragments at your feet, hasn't it? You are not afraid of anything anymore, are you?"

"No, I'm not." Will sharply inhaled as Hannibal gave his cock a sudden, hard tug, thumb sliding over the already leaking slit. Looking into Hannibal's eyes so close like this while he touched him was almost uncomfortably intense, but he couldn't look away. Didn't want to look anywhere else ever again. His hands roamed Hannibal's body, tracing the lines of his broad back, shapely thighs, the curve of his ass, as the heat built to a fever pitch within him. He loved how powerful the muscles felt under his palms. Being allowed to touch him like this was still so new, and he relished every second of it.

Hannibal touched Will harder and faster, drawing him nearer with a secure hand on his back until they were pressed so close, Will had to strain to focus his eyes. He settled on leaning his forehead on Hannibal's, their breath mingling hot and insistent as Will felt his climax rising in his belly. When he felt his release beginning to spill between their sweat slick bodies, he kissed Hannibal hard, moaning into his mouth until he felt the ripples subsiding. He nuzzled into Hannibal's neck, arms coming up to thread around his shoulder blades.

"I love you, Hannibal."

"I love you too, Will."

"I'm sorry I keep almost ruining your sheets."

Hannibal laughed softly and kissed the top of Will's head.

"I don't care so much anymore."

Sometime mid-afternoon, they finally left the comfort of bed and each other's arms and made their way downstairs. Will couldn't ignore the empty pit in his stomach anymore, and Hannibal seemed to have something special in mind.

“Boeuf bourguignon.” Hannibal said as he pulled ingredients from the fridge and laid them neatly side by side on the kitchen island.

“I believe we could use a change of culinary pace, and I also think a celebratory meal is in order to commemorate the events of today. Alas, I am still rueful that I cannot provide something more elaborate to appropriately honor the occasion. You surely deserve more, but this will have to do.”

“You know I don’t need anything fancy. I’m always happy with anything you make.”

“I know, but I still have a boundless need to provide you with more so consider this a promise to atone for the lack of gastronomical diversity at a later date. Would you like to slice the mushrooms and onions?”

“Yes, I would.” Will happily jumped up from his place on one of stools, glad to be of some service even if only minimally.

Hannibal showed him how to sear the cubed beef, Will standing behind him with his arms entwined around his waist, chin nestled on his shoulder. He taught him how to score the onions vertically and horizontally to make the pieces glide off the knife with ease in a neat, uniform dice. Will was struck once again by how natural their domesticity felt. They maneuvered around one another in the kitchen as though they had already been living together for years, a seamless ballet as they prepared dinner.

While the bourguignon was simmering, Will slid the back door open and stepped outside to breathe in the fresh air. The sun was still high in the sky, and it was a balmy spring day, the breeze just enough to be refreshing instead of chilly. Hannibal joined him, trailing a hand across the small of Will’s back as he approached.

“Could we eat outside tonight?”

“Yes, I’d like that. It appears to be very agreeable weather for it. I have a table in the shed if you would be so kind as to help me retrieve it.”

Will nodded and gestured for him to lead the way. They positioned the table between the two wooden chairs, and Hannibal ducked inside, emerging a minute later with a table cloth and two tapers encased in silver holders.

“Candles?” Will raised an eyebrow, “And here I thought that *I* was the sentimental sap between the two of us.”

“The sunlight is still blooming for now, but it will start to descend in an hour or so. It might be nice to have a little illumination if we wish to remain outside for a while.”

“Sure. Likely story. Admit it; it’s just an excuse to see my face under the flicker of candlelight.”

“I have no qualms about admitting that will be an added benefit which I readily welcome.” Hannibal smiled.

They went back inside, and Hannibal motioned for Will to join him as he began to cut slices from the bread he had baked a few days ago. He removed a small glass dish from the cabinet above and filled it halfway with olive oil. Placing a slice of bread flat on the cutting board, he rubbed a clove of garlic along the length of it and lightly painted a layer of olive oil over top of it with a basting brush. He handed Will the brush and a clove of garlic so that he could continue. Will tried to replicate the swift, clipped motions he saw Hannibal use but ended up tearing a small hole in the piece of bread.

“This is why it’s only a matter of time before you banish me from your kitchen.”

“Of course not. Bread is just as pleasing to the palate with a tear in its flesh as it is when in one flawless piece. And remember, mistakes are a necessary stop along the path to perfection.” Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will’s temple and handed him another piece of bread.

The delicious aromas suffusing the kitchen were making Will’s mouth water: fresh thyme mingling with full-bodied red wine and savory beef. They arranged the slices of bread on a baking sheet and deposited them in the oven.

“Should only be another ten minutes or so.” Hannibal said, reading Will’s mind.

“Sorry I kept us from eating all day.”

“Yes, you excelled at being exceptionally distracting today.” Hannibal smirked conspiratorially as he poured both of them a glass of wine.

“I did my best.” Will grinned back, taking a sip of wine.

When the bread came out of the oven, crisped to perfection and filling the air with a toasted garlic scent, Hannibal placed a slice on each plate and ladled the rich, thick bourguignon on top, sprinkling the dish with a little fresh parsley.

The sun waned as they ate, the wine buzzing like electricity through Will’s skin after only half a glass, seeping into his blood stream more hastily than usual on his relatively empty stomach. Hannibal poured him another glass, and Will leaned back, feeling limber and confident about the day’s events and those of the days that lay in their future.

“Hannibal?”

“Yes?” He looked up, the bones of his face somehow looking both hollow and ghostly and soft and inviting under the glow of the candles.

“In this life of compromises we’re going to have, I hope you know that there’s one point I refuse to negotiate with you.” Will was emboldened and playful from the alcohol.

“And what might that be?” Hannibal queried cautiously.

“I want a dog.”

Hannibal broke out into a genuine, wide grin.

“One could hardly know you for more than five minutes without drawing the conclusion that you will not be denied your canine companions. And why would I ever want to deny you that happiness anyway?”

Will smiled back. He looked out at the lake, admiring the last glints of sunlight sparkling on the water. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back, serene and unperturbed by anything at all.

“I’ll be sure to remind you of that the first time you find one of your expensive Italian suits covered in dog hair.”

“I have no doubt that you will.”

Chapter End Notes

So that was chapter ffoouurr. I just got started on five yesterday so it may be a little while before I finish it. I'm going to try to make it a little more plot oriented since this one ended up so dialogue heavy. I do love writing their conversations/banter though. As always, feedback is greatly appreciated!

ETA: This also ended up being a very appropriate chapter to finish now in light of some of the RDC3 events I saw recapped on tumblr hahaha.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Murder suits, fake passports, anxiety, and smut. :) As always, thanks to Effisaurus for being a lovely beta, and thanks to all of you for reading and commenting. It always lifts my spirits. I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will opened the sliding pine door and snorted at the size of the walk-in closet. Of course Hannibal wouldn't spare any expense when it came to housing his sophisticated wardrobe, even if it was in a house he barely used. Every item was encased in clear garment bags to keep out dust. One side of the closet housed a rack of clothes that appeared to be organized by season starting with darker colored heavy sweaters and woolen jackets at the front, descending down the row into cream colored linens. Will walked down the row, fingers filing through the whole collection like a child trailing the links of a fence as he walks down the sidewalk. He stopped as he reached the last item and fingered the hard yet flexible plastic, so many details clicking into place in his mind, question marks that been nagging him for years shifting into periods. Twisting the clear suit in his hand, he looked it up and down. It had a zipper running down the length of the front and even extended into plastic foot coverings. He didn't hear Hannibal walk up behind him but he sensed his presence, commanding and musky like a smoldering fire threatening to start up again into burgeoning infernos at the strike of the tiniest match.

"So this is how you…" Will didn't turn around.

"Yes."

"That explains a lot."

He felt Hannibal's breath tickling the back of his neck. A hand landed tentatively on his left shoulder like a question.

"Considering you routinely had to cut through bone, this is hardly the most disturbing tool of the trade I could stumble upon, Hannibal. I'm fine." Will answered.

"True. Still, this is a rather odd experience for me."

"I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have been looking through your things." Will turned around, eyes questioning and awaiting reproach.

"Nothing is secret here. You should feel free to look around as though it is your home as well. Consider it practice for when we have one of our own." Hannibal smiled weakly. It was

evident that this was mildly uncomfortable for him even though he did his best to remain stoic as always.

“I guess anyone else who got to see this only did because they were about to die, right?”

Hannibal nodded solemnly.

“Yes, save for a few exceptions such as the visit I paid to Frederick Chilton the day he found Abel Gideon’s corpse in his home.”

Will crossed his arms and leaned against the back wall, unsure of what to say next. In all of his years examining social cues and interactions, how to talk to your murderer boyfriend about his murder suit definitely wasn’t a topic he had stumbled upon. He imagined Hannibal in Dr. Sutcliffe’s office, covered in plastic, cracking and sawing open his jaw while Will dozed fitfully in the MRI machine a few feet away. The mental picture was both bone-chilling and comically absurd all at once.

“May I show you something else?” Hannibal asked, breaking the awkward silence.

Will nodded slowly, apprehensive about what lay in store for him. As much as he told himself that nothing could shake him after all he had seen, he knew that seeing the practical applications of Hannibal’s process was completely different from being on the other side. After all, many people have carnivorous diets, but only a few work on the farm and slaughter the meat themselves with a steady stomach without succumbing to a life of vegetarianism. This felt like a test that Will could not be sure he would pass, but he sensed it was important he did. As intimate as they had already been, the divulging of methods and any concrete details about how Hannibal did what he did (and did so well) seemed like maybe the innermost thing he could share about himself. It was definitely something no other person had ever been shown unless they were on the grizzly receiving end of said methods. On second thought, maybe Abigail had seen a glimpse of this. Will had never really asked Hannibal what had transpired between the two of them during the time he kept her hidden away; the topic brought too much pain of regret and missed opportunity.

Reaching into the middle of the clothing rack, Hannibal parted the sartorial sea and pushed on either side until a sleek black safe with a digital lock was visible. The safe did not rest on a shelf but rather inside a small cubbyhole carved out of the wall, edges sanded down smoothly. Will walked a couple steps forward to see more clearly. Hannibal punched in a code and the digital display flashed a blink of green before emitting a beep of approval. Lifting a small silver latch, Hannibal delicately pressed his thumb to a shiny black pad. A flash of blue scrolled behind his thumb and left behind a shimmery image of Hannibal’s thumbprint in its wake.

“You really are something, Dr. Lecter.” Will smirked.

“Can’t be too careful.” Hannibal smiled back.

The door swung open, and Will leaned in closer to peer inside. In addition to an alarming amount of fat stacks of bound bills, he saw passports and other identification documents. He was relieved to see that it was something less…homicidal than he had been anticipating, but

he found that his internal reaction was also tinged with disappointment. *Am I actually SAD that my serial killer boyfriend isn't taking me on a romantic tour of his Hall of Torture and Dismemberment Tools? I am clearly a paragon of mental health and stability. I should tour the inspirational speaker circuit. Maybe make my way around the high schools of America. From FBI Consultant to Murder Husband: A Career Trajectory You Too Can Have in These Five Quick Steps!* Will choked back a laugh. Hannibal stepped aside and gestured for him to go ahead and take a look. Hesitantly, Will picked up the passports at the top of the pile of forged documents and opened the first one.

He looked down at the photograph on the holographically layered page and saw his own likeness staring back at him, an unfamiliar name next to it waiting to be adopted as his own. A new disguise for Will to slip into, a person suit to manipulate into a worthwhile device for clouding the eyes of everyone around him so he could be free to…be what exactly?

"It seems strange to be masquerading as someone else after all this work to stop hiding myself."

"There is powerful ironic poetry in donning a fake identity in order to enable the true self to flourish, but it is more a necessity borne of the disavowal of others than a rejection in which you are the perpetrator. This world is not one in which you can be the most honest version of yourself without perishing under society's rules and moral judgment, particularly if you are someone like us. Perhaps you should think of it like this: is adopting a new name any different from operating under false pretenses while using your given name as you had been for so long when I met you? Are you not in fact a more authentic self now than you have ever been? A name is simply a title given to us by a person other than ourselves to whom we have no allegiance at the time. An infant cannot consent to a label at the time of birth so one is assigned, and we carry that name throughout our lives without pausing to question why. We carry on with tradition because it is what has always been done. A bit trite and obvious to quote Shakespeare, but a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, would it not?" Hannibal pushed his fingers through the hair at the nape of Will's neck.

"And here I am blindly accepting another new name also chosen for me by someone else." He felt the hand at the back of his neck bristle ever so slightly.

"Is that the aspect that bothers you? Do you feel it strips you of your agency?"

"A little. I mean, intellectually I realize it doesn't matter that much in the grand scheme of things, and that this is just how it had to be done but…I assume you had these made when…?" Will trailed off, not wanting to revisit that subject after he had broken down in sobs about it so recently.

"Yes."

"Where are Abigail's?"

"I disposed of them a few mornings ago while you slept. I did not think you needed the reminder."

"I appreciate that."

Hannibal's fingertips drew small circles on Will's neck.

"Elijah Milton." Will read the name on the passport and waited for Hannibal to explain. He knew there was no chance that Hannibal would pick a name at random. Everything would be loaded with meaning.

"Elijah fancied himself a righteous man, a moral man sanctioned by God himself. Yet in his pursuit of worship and fidelity to his god, he exhibited such brutality. His displays of cruelty toward the prophets of Baal embodied the sin which he sought to punish yet he did not see himself as akin to them. He led a vigil of devotion to prove his god to be the superior and correct deity, slaughtering oxen for a sacrificial altar and inciting the followers of Baal to self-mutilate. When God responded to Elijah's pleas and sparked fire into the altar of Yahweh while the altar to Baal remained untouched, Elijah ordered the murders of the prophets of Baal with no mercy to be shown."

"It feels good to kill bad people…but 'bad' is a very relative term, isn't it?" Will turned to face him.

"Yes, it is."

"And Milton?"

"*Paradise Lost*."

Will let out one of those short, clipped laughs of his that most people mistook for derision. Hannibal knew better though. Will set the passports back in the safe.

"Of course. Does that make you Satan?"

"If that is how you see it. While I prefer not to view myself as a slithering serpent, it is quite true that I have been the persistent influence whispering into your ear from time to time." Hannibal's expression was impenetrable, and Will was too bombarded with his own thoughts shooting off into too many flowing tributaries to count, to bother trying to dissect it further.

Will looked back at him, eyelids heavy. Up until now he had mostly only contemplated the logistics of their forthcoming lives in the abstract, envisioning what sort of environment Hannibal might prefer, what part of the globe maybe, but nothing of the finer points of how they would manage. He felt stupid and naïve for not fully understanding until now just how difficult this life might be. Maybe years from now, if they were successful and kept mobile, public memory of them would fade enough that they could stop looking over their shoulders. Maybe they could settle down and make a stable home like a normal couple. Hannibal had done it in Baltimore so it was surely possible, but Will had no idea how many tense years fraught with worry would have to pass before then. Even if they were presumed dead soon, Jack would know better. So would Alana. They had been victimized by Hannibal enough to know that distrusting how things appear to be was the smartest course of action.

Part of Will screamed that Jack wouldn't allow himself to breathe easy and would search for them tirelessly while another part of him felt ridiculous for that assertion. After all, bodies or no bodies, the cliff descent was pretty damning evidence, and Jack had been ready to give up

the search for Hannibal once before. He very well could feel the same way now. Jack was getting older and had suffered more than enough trauma in the past few years to last a lifetime; it wasn't much of a stretch to presume that he might want to spend the rest of his years without the stress of the FBI and the minds of killers infiltrating and disrupting his internal peace.

Without a word, Will trudged over to the bed and lay down with a defeated plop, eyes roving the ceiling for imperfections and bumps. Focusing on the minutiae around him helped to quiet his mind sometimes: the grain in a plank of wood, the geometric patterns on a leaf weaving together from the tiny branching veins radiating outward from the center, any visual that got more complicated the longer you looked.

Hannibal came to lie down beside him but he didn't touch, didn't speak.

"I think I need to be alone for a little while." Will closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Hannibal eyed him dubiously. Even without opening his eyes to look, Will could feel that gaze boring into him. Composed as Hannibal was, Will figured he wouldn't say anything but was probably concerned.

"Would you like to stay up here? You can use the study if you like."

Will finally opened his eyes and turned to look at him.

"No, I think I'll go outside for a bit. Get some air."

Hannibal swallowed and turned onto his back.

"I won't go far. I need to think and sometimes that's hard to do with you around, distracting as you can be." Will flashed a flirty smile he hoped would put Hannibal at ease.

He didn't say anything, but Will did see a faint upturn at the corners of his mouth.

"Stop worrying, Hannibal."

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

Hannibal shifted onto his side, and Will followed suit to bring them face to face. Cupping Will's cheek, Hannibal pulled him in for a kiss, soft and slow. Will responded with a low moan, and Hannibal drew him closer and nibbled on his bottom lip.

"See? Distractions abound." Will pulled back and ran a hand through Hannibal's hair.

Hannibal smiled genuinely this time, some of the tension easing out of his face.

"I won't be long."

"Okay. I will be here for you when you get back."

Will followed the edge of the lake until he had walked about a half mile or so. There was a thick tree stump several yards from the water, and he ambled over to sit down on it. The vivid midafternoon sun was mildly startling. Something about being outside after the isolation of the day reminded Will of that befuddling effect of leaving a dark movie theater only to find that the day was still blazing hot and bright. The weather didn't match his mood.

At first, he couldn't work out why he was so bothered by this. He went through every possibility point by point. The intricacies of maintaining their false personas seemed trivial in a way compared to the fact that Will had already come to terms with and agreed to be a part of the more sinister half of Hannibal's life even if they hadn't discussed at length just how that would play out. Will sifted that option to the discard pile. Hannibal was right. There wasn't anything inherently less authentic about taking on a new identity than there was about him living as he had been before Hannibal.

And although he was stressed by the looming storm cloud of the FBI's hunt, the more he considered it, the more he found that he knew in his heart of hearts they would be fine. It wasn't just that he trusted Hannibal to keep them under the radar and know how to maneuver under these conditions with stealth and precision. It was also a gut feeling that things would unfold as they should. After all, Will had been prepared to die as he fell from that cliff. Whatever fate had in store for them, Will was ready to accept it.

So why this pesky current of anxiety still pumping through him? Like an itch just out of reach for him to scratch away, it evaded him as he sorted through every point. He analyzed each and every superficial concern that bobbed to the surface, trying to find the true cause of it all. It wasn't completely disingenuous to lay the blame on the stress of plunging forward into a life on the run and all that would entail, but it wasn't the whole picture. He knew the root was underneath it, that all the other thoughts were only window dressing his brain had concocted to avoid confronting what was really agitating him.

He watched the bubbles from the lungs of the fish in the lake ripple to the surface and burst into concave depressions before fading away, and it hit him. He felt disappointment creep in as the epiphany took hold. Surely he was beyond all that, and something so small shouldn't trigger a response like this.

Pushing off the tree stump with the heels of his hands, Will moved to the ground. Lying on his back, he watched the clouds drift by high above him. Two large cumuli floating side by side twisted together at the edge, wisps snaking around each other like ivy. He could have sworn they began to take the shape of antlers, but when he blinked hard and opened his eyes again, it was gone.

The house was eerily quiet when he came back. The sound of the back door sliding shut echoed with an exaggerated bang in his ears. Hannibal wasn't in the living room or kitchen. Will was about to go upstairs to check the bedroom when he heard the creaking of the study door.

"Hey."

"I see you have returned."

Will only nodded.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Yes. Yes, I think I would."

"Bourbon?" Hannibal made his way over to the bar, Will trailing behind.

"Please."

He handed the tumbler to Will and took out another for himself. Will raised his eyebrows.

"Some occasions are not wine occasions." Hannibal said matter-of-factly as he poured the maroon liquid into both glasses.

"You know, at first I couldn't put my finger on what was making me react to those passports. I hate physical anxiety that bursts forth before you have a thought to match with it. It always feels like a betrayal, my mind and body rebelling against each other without giving me any say in the matter."

Hannibal made an amused sound.

"That is how trauma comports itself. It seeps in when triggers are present, spreading like a feverish cancer, and pays no mind to whether or not your conscious self is aware that it has been triggered."

"Are you admitting to traumatizing me?" Will sat on the couch, leaning back and stretching his legs out in front of him.

"I am saying that your mind *feels* it was traumatized and has reacted accordingly." Hannibal sat down on the couch, but he didn't move too close to Will.

"Ever evasive, Dr. Lecter." Will laughed.

"Everything I did, I did because I believed it to be best for you. Inflicting trauma was never my intention."

"I know," Will's eyes traveled to the back door. The sun was at half-mast in the sky now. "How did you know that's what was happening earlier today?"

“I noticed certain behavior patterns that correspond to implosive anxiety: sudden silence, staring into a fixed point in the distance, pallor of the skin. Anxiety is exhibited differently depending on the circumstances and the person experiencing it. It does not always reveal itself through the more aggressive means people generally associate it with such as irregular breathing and profuse perspiration.”

“Jesus, I didn’t know I was so pathetically transparent.”

“Well, it undoubtedly would have passed by a less observant person without notice or perhaps excused as another one of your eccentricities, but I *am* a psychiatrist, Will.”

“But you didn’t say anything.” Will looked at Hannibal questioningly.

“No. I was mildly concerned, but I felt it best to let you parse the sensory information and deduce the cause independently rather than feeding you my own conclusions.”

“Hannibal…” Will was positively beaming.

“What are you smiling about?” Hannibal smiled back and reached out a hand to tangle in Will’s curls.

“I just fucking love you. That’s all.” It wasn’t a lie, but Will kept the more complete truth to himself. He knew it would come across as patronizing and saying it out loud carried the risk of discouraging any similar future behavior, like approaching a feral cat who lingers in the yard long enough to make you forget that it isn’t domesticated. But what a glorious thing to bear witness to; Hannibal Lecter was growing and changing. It seemed his first instinct with regard to Will was no longer to manipulate. Will was aware that vigilance around Hannibal was not something to completely discard just yet or maybe ever, but something told him that Hannibal intended to make concessions to keep Will around this time. He wanted this too much not to.

“And I think that’s why I have a hard time understanding how I could still…” Will shook his head and ran a tired hand down his face, “something about seeing the passports…it hearkened back to when you controlled everything, when any iota of perceived independence was just a smokescreen because you pulled all the strings *always*. But even so, I know it’s not the same now, and I guess I don’t know how I could have my feet firmly planted on the other side and still be affected like this. I don’t *want* it to bother me.”

“As I have said, the consummation of this relationship is still very new despite the length of the courtship leading here. While your conscious mind may have forgiven and chosen to move on, your subconscious and the after effects of your trauma may not be so easily swayed. You may experience a wave of anxiety like this one from time to time.” Hannibal was almost clinical in his explanation, removed as though discussing a former patient instead of his current lover.

“And what should I do about that?"

Hannibal looked at him with an unblinking thousand yard stare. It occurred to Will that he was pausing because he really did not want to interfere with him in this way. It echoed their

past unbalanced relationship of unofficial psychiatrist and patient too much, and Hannibal didn't want to tread where he wasn't welcome.

"It's okay, Hannibal. I'm asking."

Hannibal took a hearty gulp of bourbon and sighed.

"Well…I think you handled it admirably today. You removed yourself from the catalyst of the reaction, took the time to reflect, and came out the other side of your contemplation with a much better understanding of what had occurred and why. I would suggest that you continue to take this course of action should the problem arise again and perhaps remember not to berate yourself for any perceived lack of progress. It is…Natural for this to happen as much as I am reluctant to admit that."

"And you won't mind me removing myself from the trigger for a little bit even if the trigger is you?"

"No. I recognize it for what it is. I know you will come back."

"This is…it feels big, this small conversation." Will opted to take the risk after all. Hannibal needed to know how much this meant to him.

"Yes, I suppose it is." Hannibal huffed out a short laugh and ran his fingers over his tumbler to trace the bevels in the design.

Will deposited his glass on the coffee table and, sliding next to Hannibal, reached for his and put it down as well. He crawled onto his lap, thighs bracketing Hannibal's hips. Cradling Hannibal's face in his hands, Will drew him into a slow, passionate kiss.

"I kind of have the urge to reward you for it." Will's lips made their way down to Hannibal's neck.

"I certainly would not deter you from the task. What is it you would like?"

Will pulled back and looked into Hannibal's eyes, steady determination written on his face.

"You have the look of a man who has just arrived at a very important decision. I wonder just what that could be." Hannibal tilted his head curiously.

"I think you know." Will sucked on Hannibal's earlobe and ground his growing hardness into Hannibal's lap.

"Will." Hannibal took Will's face in his hands, thumbs stroking just below his ears, and gazed searchingly, "Are you absolutely sure about this?"

"Why wouldn't I be? And don't you want to fuck me, Hannibal?" Will purred, grinding his hips hard again.

"I am sure that by now it is quite obvious I want nothing more, but this is rather soon. You have never been penetrated before me, correct?"

“Yeah, does it matter?” Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

“It matters to me, yes. It affects how we proceed.”

“I’m not a fragile teacup, Hannibal.”

“You may find it hard to accept that you need coddling. You may fancy yourself invincible after the events which have transpired and one could hardly blame you, all things considered. However, I am not belittling you; I am simply being realistic. I have only breached you once and briefly with my fingers. It might not be that easy to accept more at first. I want you to be aware that it may hurt. It will be pleasurable too, but I do want you to be mindful of the reality of how this will work.”

“I don’t fucking care. You’ve stabbed me and cut into my brain and I sent us both to our deaths off a goddamn cliff. What’s a little more pain between us now?” Will fumbled for Hannibal’s shirt, undoing the buttons clumsily.

“So impatient.” Hannibal said hungrily, licking his lips and pinning Will with those dark, lustful eyes.

“We’ve been waiting five fucking years. I’m allowed a little impatience. Besides, I know you’ll handle me carefully. You always do.” Will looked at Hannibal adoringly, eyes hooded with desire.

Hands on either side of Will’s hips, Hannibal rose to his feet and hoisted Will up with him. Will wrapped his legs tightly around Hannibal’s waist and linked his arms around his neck. He let himself be carried, marveling at Hannibal’s strength. It felt so good to be picked up and carried like a bride across the threshold. He was beginning to love surrendering to Hannibal and couldn’t wait to do so with him inside, filling him until they were one body.

They climbed the stairs with only one misstep, Will bumping against the railing with a playful laugh.

“This is ridiculous.”

“But you like it all the same.” Hannibal laid him down on the lush cotton sheets and took a moment just to take in the sight of him. He looked with such blatant worship that it made Will blush. “I want to remember you before and after.”

They undressed each other hastily, mouths connecting with skin every time another piece of clothing was shed. It was like breaking contact for even a second was pure agony. Hannibal grabbed a fistful of hair at the root and pulled Will’s head back, his tongue tracing the length of the younger man’s neck.

“God, I love it when you do that.” Will’s eyelids fluttered. They had barely begun, but he already felt like he was dissolving into warm liquid, his whole body filled to the brim with heat from fingertips to toes.

“I’ve noticed.” Hannibal murmured into Will’s neck before biting down and sucking hard, “I love seeing my marks on you. Were anyone to see this part of your body right now, they would have no doubts about who you belong to.”

“*Yes*.” Will made a mental note to admire his collection of bruises tomorrow, every yellow, red and purple hue dotting to the surface was a beautiful brand to remind him that this was real. They were finally here, and this was real. He kissed down Hannibal’s chest, a hand curling in the soft tufts of hair there, sucking on a nipple until he got the groaning response he wanted.

Hannibal leaned over the left side of the bed to open the nightstand drawer and remove the lube, the movement bringing about a crash of their groins that made Will moan. When Hannibal moved back, his brow was furrowed in concern.

“Everything okay?”

“Now it is my turn to dispel the mood with serious conversation before both of us are too engrossed in each other to think about it.”

“Oh…What kind of serious conversation?” Will’s heart beat was irregular in his chest, skipping with fear as he waited for Hannibal’s response. Had he changed his mind? Did he have another Abigail level reveal to make that would have Will questioning everything? The seconds ticked off almost audibly as though an ancient grandfather clock was chiming menacingly above them. His pulse continued to race as he tried to self-talk the nerves away.

“Obviously, I have been celibate in the last few years due to my circumstances, and before that, I engaged in rigorous testing of all sorts on a regular basis not only for sexual purposes but because of the blood I inadvertently would ingest during a kill on occasion. Right now, I cannot help but think of our first mutual slaughter.”

“Oh?” Will looked back, confused at first until Hannibal’s meaning dawned on him, “*Oh*. Wow. I hadn’t even thought about that.”

“No, I suspected you had not.”

Will was a little miffed to hear him say that, but he couldn’t very well open his mouth to protest and insist that he was a responsible adult who didn’t let something as important as that slip his mind when Hannibal was one hundred percent correct in the assumption that he *had*.

“So, um…In that nightstand, do you have…”

“I do.”

“They aren’t expired?”

“No, not yet.”

“Ok, then I guess that’s what we should do…Ugh, I’m being taken back to that middle school sex ed place again.” Will covered his eyes with his forearm.

“Well, it was a necessary discussion to have. And it was over quickly and painlessly, no?” Hannibal’s eyes crinkled in amusement at Will’s shyness.

“Yeah, I guess so. Hey, why do you have condoms here anyway?” Will said, lowering his forearm from his eyes.

“I excel in being prepared for all outcomes, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, but…” Will’s mouth hung open as he realized the probable cause for the presence of condoms in Hannibal’s safe house, “They were here for us, weren’t they? Just not us *now*.”

Hannibal didn’t say anything, but his eyes flicked over Will with some semblance of wistfulness.

“You were *so* sure I’d fuck you.” Will waggled his eyebrows.

“No. As I said, I excel in preparing for *all* outcomes. Preparation does not equal unwavering assurance that a possible result will come to fruition.”

“But you *wanted* it to.” Will stretched his arms and folded his hands behind his head, smiling conceitedly.

“Yes, I believe that has been established with tireless repetition. Are you quite finished? Because if you continue down this path of tedium and self-congratulation, I may just reconsider giving you want you want.” Hannibal sighed in exasperation, but Will could tell he was smiling underneath it all.

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Would I not? I have already waited five long years. What is one more night?” Hannibal smiled in earnest now, taking obvious pleasure in their teasing exchange.

“I don’t think you can refuse me. Not when I ask,” Will drew closer, tongue darting out to run along Hannibal’s neck, “so” then his jaw, “very”, then his ear, “nicely. *Please, Hannibal. I need you.”*

Hannibal gasped as though he had been holding in a breath for too long.

“You are so exquisite when you beg. So irrefutably enticing. If it had not been for my restraints when that ‘please’ escaped your lips in my cell…I do not think I could have resisted bending you over that desk. The way you looked at me with those faux coquettish eyes…You knew exactly what you were doing, and you did it with such devious glee. Didn’t you?”

“*Yes.”* Will hissed, palming Hannibal’s cock and nibbling on his bottom lip.

Hannibal began to back away, and Will whined at the loss of contact. When he saw Hannibal opening the lube, his whine turned into a preemptive moan as his face flushed thinking about what would happen next. Every inch of him was humming in anticipation. Hannibal gently pushed Will’s thighs up and apart until his knees were bent with both feet planted on the bed.

Coating his middle finger in the lube, he started rubbing light circles on Will's entrance, kissing and licking along the insides of his thighs while he stroked Will's erection with the other hand.

It was so much pleasure at once, his whole lower body dominated, *owned,* by Hannibal's hands, his lips, his tongue. When he finally pushed his finger inside, Will groaned and gathered the sheets in his fists, head lolling back on the pillows. Hannibal crawled up Will's body, leaving a trail of kisses and bites along the way. Their mouths met, slick and hot, tongues twisting together greedily as Hannibal slid his finger in and out of Will. Never breaking the kiss, Hannibal withdrew slowly, slicking two fingers before pushing both of them back inside. Will felt the pressure building like before, undulating through him up into his belly, his cock painfully hard now. When Hannibal curled his fingers upward and hit that perfect spot, Will clutched at his shoulders hard enough to bruise, panting and licking into Hannibal's mouth.

"Look at you," When Hannibal pulled back and gazed down at Will with those penetrating eyes, he looked positively ravenous. He could tell Hannibal wouldn't be able to wait much longer, and frankly, neither would Will, "so intoxicated by every sensation. Another night sometime in the future, I will try to make you come just from this, just my fingers stretching and stroking you. You will beg for me to touch you and give you the release you crave, but I will not. I will watch you writhe and moan until you fear that your very sanity will be driven from your mind unless you finally reach that pinnacle of pleasure."

"God, you're a fucking sadist." Will choked out with a strangled cry halfway between a laugh and a moan as Hannibal started scissoring his fingers, widening him from the inside out, fucking into him harder and faster every second.

"And you are a bit of a masochist, are you not? So it appears we are complimentary." Hannibal grinned, and it was somehow dark and menacing and sweet and loving all at once.

"Hannibal, *please*." Will couldn't take the anticipation any more. His whole body was shaking and sweating. He swore he could feel his blood as it pumped through every vein, every nerve ending alight and crackling like glowing embers beneath the surface of his skin.

"Please, what?" Hannibal cocked his head to one side in feigned ignorance of Will's desperate plea.

"You're so damn awful." Will whined as he threw his head back.

"And you love me for it."

"*Yes.* God help me, I fucking do. *Hannibal, please fuck me. Please, I want you inside me."* Will felt the scarlet color creep hotly into his cheeks from that irresistible mixture of embarrassment and arousal he was beginning to accept that he loved so very much.

"You're being such a very good boy, Will," Hannibal withdrew his fingers and reached into the nightstand, producing a small foil packet, "yielding to me so quickly and with such hunger. Are you sure you're ready, my darling boy?"

“Yes.” Will whimpered. Being called a good boy again flooded his brain with thoughts of submission, his cock twitching in excitement when he realized just how much carnal territory they had left to explore. This was only the hike up the mountain, and Will ached to see what awaited him at the summit and down the other side.

Hannibal cradled the side of his face and gave Will a soft kiss before crouching between his legs. He opened the condom, put it on and leisurely slathered his cock in lube, making sure Will was watching him. Leaning forward, he came up to rest his forearms on either side of Will’s shoulders. Suddenly eye to eye, Hannibal’s breath wafting across his lips, Will felt shyness creep in, his muscles tensing.

As always, Hannibal could sense the shift and acted accordingly.

“Take a breath,” he said, placing a warm, reassuring hand on Will’s lower abdomen.

Will obeyed and closed his eyes for a second. Concentrating on everything below the waist, he took a deep breath and envisioned every muscle and tendon relaxing and lying fluid and loose under his skin. He opened his eyes and nodded. Hannibal kissed him again before retreating to hook his arms under Will’s knees, spreading his legs a little wider. Hannibal grasped his cock and cautiously pushed the head inside. Will felt a little resistance against the tight ring of muscle as it stretched to adjust, but as Hannibal gradually pushed further inside, everything felt easier. The sting of initial entry wore off, replaced by pleasantly tingling nerves, and Will found the courage to look down at the place where their bodies were joined. He was amazed to see that their bodies were flush, and he had taken Hannibal hilt deep.

Running his hands up Will’s torso, Hannibal moved up to meet him, pressing their chests together.

“Hi.” Will said, and then squeezed his eyes shut, wincing at his stupidity. *Why did I say that? Hi?!*

“Hello, darling Will.” Hannibal rasped, that husky voice dripping out like melted chocolate and making Will swoon.

Hannibal rocked his hips forward, and Will gasped.

“*Oh.* Fuck.” Will opened his eyes again, and it was a little alarming to be looking at Hannibal this close while he was buried inside him. It was unbearably intimate and not enough at the same time. Will drew his knees up to squeeze around Hannibal’s waist and draped his arms around his upper back. Hannibal began to thrust again, short and shallow, and Will gripped him harder.

“Hannibal, it feels – ” Will wasn’t sure what to say. There was no succinct way to describe it, no words that would do it justice because it wasn’t just something physical, not just neurons firing and skin touching skin, but the culmination of everything somehow. Finally being where they both belonged, finally being honest with themselves and with each other, and every thrust Hannibal made felt like it would break Will apart and yet still never be enough. He held him closer, nuzzling his face into Hannibal’s neck and wrapping his legs around his back. Hannibal responded, folding his arms behind Will’s shoulders in a safe, warm embrace.

Will wanted as much of their bodies to touch as possible. It was like Hannibal was a mirage that he worried would fade into smoke if he didn't hold on as tightly as possible to prove that he was real.

Hannibal sped up, his hips slapping against Will in a steady rhythm, hitting his prostate with every stroke. Will's moans were broken into helpless stuttering gasps now, panting against Hannibal's sweat slick skin as he listened to Hannibal's own urgent, breathy sighs in his ear. He disentangled Will's arms from his shoulders and pushed his chest back onto the bed. Will whimpered in protest.

"I want to look at you, watch you become completely unhinged and absorbed in this moment and nothing else. You feel so perfect around me, Will, enveloping me like I belong inside you. Are you stunned at how resilient your body is, how you stretch to take me so easily?"

"Yes. You feel so good inside me. I can't believe you're finally fucking me. I don't – " *I don't want it to end. I hope I can feel you inside me even when you're gone. I hope you never stop wanting me like this.* He couldn't make his lips form the words, couldn't shape his leaden tongue into syllables anymore as his voice erupted in frantic moans again.

"I know. I know, Will." Hannibal stared back at him, equally rapturous and in love, and it made the heat pooling low in Will's belly spread even further.

"I-I'm so close. Can you touch me? *Please.*" Will barely recognized his own voice. It sounded hoarse, faraway, and so nakedly full of yearning floating back into his ears.

Hannibal reached a hand between their feverish bodies and wrapped it around Will's erection. It was all too much: Hannibal stroking Will's cock while he fucked him more insistently by the minute, Hannibal's eyes connecting with his with such intensity it almost burned, their flesh snapping together with every drive of Hannibal's hips. His senses were overloaded, flooded with Hannibal and nothing else.

He came with Hannibal's name on his lips, spilling in hot stripes on his stomach as Hannibal continued to push against his prostate. Will felt his muscles clench around Hannibal's cock as his orgasm overtook him, and Hannibal groaned as he felt it too. As the waves of pleasure receded, Will kept his eyes open, determined not to miss a second of this. It wasn't long before Hannibal was coming too. Will was overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of it: Hannibal's cock pulsing inside him with every ripple of release, Hannibal looking at him like he was the most brilliant, radiant creature he had ever seen, the way the sweat pooled in the hollow of his collarbone.

Hannibal drew Will tightly to him for a kiss before pulling out and coming to rest beside him, both of them sweaty and breathless.

"That was perfect." Will whispered.

"I concur. You are absolutely perfect, Will." Hannibal nosed around Will's neck and shoulders, lapping up the sweat with a languorous tongue.

“Mmm, you’re just doing that to taste my sweat, aren’t you? Insatiable.” Will smiled dreamily. He was residing somewhere on the spectrum of sated exhaustion and rapturous adrenaline, unsure which one would win out.

“I love every taste and smell of you that I have had the pleasure of learning thus far, and I am nearly impatient with eagerness to make the acquaintance of those that yet remain.” Hannibal smiled against Will’s skin.

“Give me an hour and maybe we can knock a couple others off the list.”

“A full hour? Perhaps you’re not a boy after all. Succumbing to the erosion of your sexual recovery time already?”

“Hey, I wouldn’t be slinging around ageist insults about my rebound time unless you want jokes about how stamina dwindles as a man ages. How old are you anyway?” Will smirked and jabbed a finger in Hannibal’s ribs.

“Such discourtesy and so soon after he has been pleased so impeccably that his body could barely withstand it. I’m hardly *old*, and my stamina leaves nothing to be desired.” Hannibal laughed softly and kissed Will’s forehead.

“Damn right.” Will cuddled close now that the sweat was starting to cool from his skin. His heart rate returned to normal as he came back down to reality, endorphins slowing to bring him to a state of calm contentment.

He pictured Jack, Alana, or Molly bursting in unexpectedly to find them naked in each other’s arms, legs entwined and the room smelling like sex. Would any of them really be surprised or had everyone always known? Had it been obvious to everyone this whole time? He absently noticed that there was still pale light streaming in from the windows although it was beginning to fade.

“What time is it?”

Hannibal reached for the clock on the night stand.

“Quarter to seven.”

“It’s early.” Will felt a little idiotic after he said it. Time didn’t really mean a whole lot in their current situation. Nowhere they needed to be, no schedule to keep, no people to meet. It was almost a vacation in some warped sense of the word.

“Yes, and I feel rather incongruously alert after the strenuous activities of today.” Hannibal’s voice dipped down salaciously as he said *activities.*

“Me too.” Will realized he did feel energized, jittery even. He lifted his head from Hannibal’s shoulders and grinned giddily as a plan unfolded in his mind. “Hey. Get drunk with me.”

“That is an altogether absurd and sudden request, Will.” Hannibal raised his eyebrows.

“Well, we just had sex for the first time, and I feel like celebrating. Besides, I’ve never seen you drunk. Control freak that you are, I’m sure it rarely happens *if at all*, and what good is it being on the other side of the veil if I don’t get to see things no one else does?” Will chuckled as he imagined what it would be like.

“It is true that I rarely imbibe to inebriation. I do not particularly like losing control of my faculties, neither mentally nor physically, nor do I find any beneficial use for inhabiting a state of hedonistic excess in general. Fine wine is meant to be savored, swirled over the tongue without haste in consumption and given its due attention as it lingers on one’s palate and fills all the senses. In every bottle of each varietal is written the map of the landscape that bore the fruit before it was plucked from the vine: the climate, the quality of the soil, how early the frost came, all of these factors differ from year to year and nurture a unique product which may never again be identically reproduced.” Hannibal looked stubborn and unyielding, but then slowly his expression broke, his lips upturning enough for Will to know he was entertaining the idea despite what he said.

“That’s a beautiful sentiment, Hannibal. And I’m not being sarcastic; it really is. However, even you admitted that some occasions are not wine occasions. Come on. Drink too much bourbon with me. Somewhere around drink three you can present the rest of that stack of documents I know you’re absolutely dying to show me so we can start to plot our next move. *Please.”* Will gazed at Hannibal imploringly, doing his best to mimic his expression back in Hannibal’s cell a few weeks ago.

“Dying is an overzealous word choice, but yes I had rather hoped we would advance beyond the first passport today. Now kindly stop making those atrociously manipulative coy eyes at me.” Hannibal said with a smile.

“I thought you loved them. I thought they were *so enticing.*” Will teased, tickling Hannibal’s ribs lightly with the tips of his fingers.

“That is precisely *why* I detest them so much.” Hannibal ran a hand through Will’s hair and kissed the top of his head. “Now, shall we make our way to the shower before you attempt to fashion me into a common, unrefined drunkard for the evening?”

“So dramatic.” Will rolled his eyes and then his expression softened, gaze full of devotion, “This is going to work, isn’t it?”

He said it with wonderment, as though it was a remarkable truth he hadn’t wanted to let himself believe. *They* were going to work.

“Yes,” Hannibal brought a hand up to stroke the side of Will’s face, “it has become apparent over the years that no force in this world, be it nature, God, fate, man, or beast will allow anything less.”

“All roads leading here.” Will wrapped his fingers around Hannibal’s hand.

“All roads leading here, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

So that's chapter fffiiivveee. Let me know your thoughts! I hope you're all having a lovely week, fannibals. Btw, if any of you want to be tumblr buddies I can be found here: It's Me

At this point, it's about 90% a Hannibal/Hannigram tumblr because this ship consumes me lol.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Drunk Hannibal and Will and a dark cliffhanger that I hope you will all like! A hearty thank you to my friend Unpetaled for the idea for the ending of this one. Once she said it, it was like "Oh yeah...this needs to happen ASAP. No question." And thanks again to the lovely Effisaurus for beta-ing. A great help as always. :)

Lastly, thanks to all of YOU who are still reading and commenting. It fills me with endless joy. You have no idea. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"*I gave you a child, if you recall."* Will mocked, trying and failing to mimic Hannibal's smoky Eastern European drawl. "Soap opera drama level achieved, Hannibal."

He wasn't slurring. More often than not, Will had a tendency to over-enunciate when drunk as if to over-compensate and maintain an illusion of sobriety, punctuating every syllable with the precise, harsh click of something mechanical running on an assembly line. He did, however, tend to gesticulate a little more wildly and be even looser with his uncouth comments toward people he disliked. The change was too subtle to be detected by someone who wasn't all that familiar with Will on an intimate basis since he was already pretty filter-less when coerced into social situations. Granted, that wasn't as true these days. Will had to admit that he had learned some valuable lessons from Hannibal on the importance of harnessing control, and he was less standoffish in group settings now even when his insides were screaming with contempt.

"I was incarcerated with little else to do besides wandering the halls of my own mind and sketching images from memory. I had to obtain a source of entertainment somehow, did I not?" Hannibal smiled and clinked his glass to Will's.

Will laughed and leaned his elbow against the back of the couch, bringing his chin to rest in the heel of his palm. It was mildly chilly now that the sun had descended for the night so Hannibal had put some logs in the fireplace. Will was half swaddled in a soft, dark brown blanket. He was almost giddy, the alcohol flowing through his blood stream and warming him from the inside out.

"God, you're so fucking sexy. I don't…" Will let out a huff of frustration as he stared at Hannibal's face, "It's like I rejected a Swedish ski brochure model. I'm an idiot. What even *are* those cheekbones?!"

"Dear Will, it appears that you have waded into the waters of excessive inebriation and may sink under completely at any moment." Hannibal smiled fondly and pushed Will's curls back

from his forehead.

“Excessive is a strong word. I’d say I’m a solid five out of ten, and you’re delighting in it anyway. Besides, it’s been a long time since I could just look at you for the sake of looking without dissecting and searching for motives and secrets like you’re a code waiting to be cracked,” Will crashed his lips against Hannibal’s roughly, tugging on the hair at the back of his neck.

“I shudder to think what unspeakable horrors a level ten would bequeath onto this world. It is strange to see you like this, but it is a welcome change of pace. You are untethered from all concerns, aren’t you? No tenacious vines of thought binding together against the trellis of your mind until you can no longer discern between them?” Hannibal pulled Will closer.

“*The trellis of my mind?!* Not your finest flowery metaphor, Dr. Lecter. I’m disappointed.”

“No, admittedly I am not at my brightest for obvious reasons. ‘Three be the things I shall never attain: envy, content, and sufficient champagne.’” Hannibal took a hearty drink of his bourbon before setting it down on the coffee table.

“Ah ha!” Will pointed with an accusatory finger. “You’re drunk. Dr. Hannibal Lecter, arbiter of propriety, is drunk! Alert the media! Take a commemorative photo!” Will formed his hand around his mouth like a mock megaphone and spoke the words behind him as though he were the town crier. “You know, I wouldn’t have taken you for a Dorothy Parker fan. She seems a bit irreverent for your taste. Not remotely concerned with proper social etiquette.”

Will hit the syllables of “etiquette” with a staccato punch.

“I am mildly socially lubricated at best, Will. And while Ms. Parker’s aesthetics are not perfectly aligned with my own, I do appreciate the brazen defiance of her spirit. She was caustic without caution and unapologetically herself at a time when it was exceedingly difficult to do so as a woman. But I quoted her because I see parallels between the two of you. You share a certain…Steadfast contempt for those you deem to be inauthentic and a gift for artfully articulating that scorn. Nothing as severe as misanthropy but rather something adjacent and more whimsical.”

“Well, thank you. I will take that as a compliment.” Will raised his glass in salute and took another sip.

“As you should.”

“Hannibal Lecter, what have I done to you? Quoting Dorothy Parker? Drinking bourbon? What’s next? Wearing jeans?”

“You are quite incorrigible tonight. I can see that delving into any planning for our impending lives together would be futile in this state,” Hannibal said with amusement. His accent had grown thicker with drink, his Ls more elongated and his Rs rolling more musically. A subtle change but Will could tell. “You lured me into this compromised condition under false pretenses, Mr. Graham.”

“I’m sorry,” Will cast his eyes downward and fiddled with his tumbler of bourbon, “I think part of me is still avoiding it. I know it’s only putting off the inevitable, but it’s so nice here.”

Will looked up at Hannibal with pleading eyes.

“I like just being here with you and not having to think about anything else. It feels like we deserve it too, doesn’t it? All the strife and obstacles…It feels right to have a break before we leave.” *A murder husband honeymoon.* Will laughed at the thought.

“I agree. I immensely enjoy being here with you as well, and that’s alright for now. We have time.” Hannibal massaged Will’s shoulder reassuringly.

“You keep saying that but is it really true?” Will’s brow furrowed as he gripped his glass tighter.

“Well, time is not in infinite supply for any of us on this Earth. Mortality is always the all-encompassing darkness chasing us, threatening and motivating us to accomplish and achieve, but in terms of whether or not we should feel compelled to forge once more onto the breach before we are ready? No, I believe we can wait until we are both fully prepared to leave. I do not anticipate your needs interfering with our safety. We have only been here a short while. I promise that worrying is very unnecessary and will not accomplish anything.” Hannibal plucked Will’s glass from his iron grip and set it on the table. “Come here.”

Will sidled closer until their bodies were pressed up against each other, Will’s chin hanging over Hannibal’s shoulder. Hannibal pressed feathery kisses to his neck, and Will moaned in response. The alcohol made his blood beat thickly in his veins, and his flushed skin felt even more sensitive than it usually was to Hannibal’s touch. Will pushed Hannibal back and climbed onto his lap, straddling him as he kissed him deeply and ardently. Hannibal squeezed Will’s ass with both hands, causing Will’s hips to roll forward and extricate a gasp from both of them.

“Since we’re not going to get any planning done any time soon,” Will ground his hips down hard just to hear Hannibal groan again, “maybe we could do something else?”

“I don’t know…How are you feeling, Will?” Hannibal eyed him dubiously.

“Pleasantly buzzed but sober enough to enthusiastically consent and use words like perspicacious correctly. I think you know that. I appreciate you checking though,” Will said sincerely.

Hannibal gave him a long evaluating look before nodding in satisfaction. His lips spread into a devilish grin.

“And what is it you propose we do?”

“Mmm,” Will licked his way up Hannibal’s neck and brought his mouth up to whisper in his ear, “I don’t know. You could fuck my mouth with your back against the wall, I could ride you right here, you could bend me over this couch. We have so many options. What do *you* want?”

When Will looked up to see Hannibal's reaction, he moaned at the sight of him. Hannibal's eyes were closed, his face reddened, and his chest was rising and falling rapidly. He finally looked as undone as Will usually did, and it made Will's mouth hang open in awe.

"God, look at you. You're overwhelmed by how much I'm letting you do so much sooner than you'd imagined, aren't you? Giving you everything you want without you having to manipulate and coax me into it. No one else has ever made you feel like this, have they?" Will heard himself sounding just like Hannibal talking to him only a couple hours ago, and the role reversal was just too deliciously erotic.

"You could not possibly comprehend the extent and significance of what you do to me, Will. It is a treacherous precipice on which to stand, but I do it with little consideration for how I may fall." Hannibal opened his eyes and held Will's face in both hands.

"If we fall, we fall together."

"Yes, but Will…" Hannibal's eyes wrinkled in concern.

"What? What's wrong?"

"On second thought, I think it best to not venture into any as yet uncharted territory tonight. Not like this. Command of the English language or not, I want your lucidity at full capacity. One does not have thorough comprehension of their limits and boundaries when under the influence. Everything is muddy and blurred, shrouded in a gauzy film even when that does not seem to be the case."

"I have little respect for boundaries and limits, and the same is true for you. I see no reason not to use that to our advantage. Do you?" Will challenged, taking two of Hannibal's fingers in his mouth and sucking shamelessly.

"What an unabashed temptress you are. You have found your power and embraced it to the fullest extent, haven't you? You know exactly what you do to me and are exploiting it to the best of your ability. Well done, my clever boy." Hannibal grinned proudly.

"You're still going to deny me though, aren't you?" Will removed Hannibal's fingers from his mouth and bucked his hips again.

"Yes, I am. But I think you enjoy the denial almost as much as you enjoy getting what you want. And you *will* get what you want. Just not at this particular moment in time." Hannibal gently pushed Will off his lap, retrieved his glass from the coffee table, and leaned back to take a triumphant sip.

"You are both the absolute best and worst. And hey, who says things have to end up in uncharted territory?" Will moved back to sit upright, shoulders against the back of the couch.

"Are you sore from earlier?" Hannibal didn't sound concerned exactly, more pragmatically curious than anything.

“A little, but it’s not bothering me. I kind of like it.” Will could feel a dull ache settling in, but it was a pleasant soreness like tonguing a scratch on the roof of your mouth. It pleasingly straddled the line between pain and pleasure and served as a tangible reminder of what had transpired only a few hours ago, proof of Hannibal’s hunger for him.

Hannibal smirked and then his lips slowly turned down, his face settling into a contemplative expression.

“What are you thinking about?” Will tapped Hannibal’s shin with his foot.

“Something just occurred to me. Every lascivious suggestion you made involved a particular dynamic, you receiving as I take from you. While I certainly derive great satisfaction from watching you submit to me, has it not occurred to you that our roles need not be carved in stone?”

Will didn’t know what to say. He couldn’t picture Hannibal willingly putting himself in a vulnerable position in the bedroom. Hannibal was just so…Hannibal. This was the man behind the most malicious of machinations, the marionettist dangling all of his puppets in front of the lushly curtained grand stage of his choosing, the man who couldn’t even tolerate an errant tissue left on his end table by a patient or Will hopping up to sit on his kitchen counter (the look he got for that one could have melted steel). The thought of him spread out before Will like an offering, naked and looking over his shoulder shyly, awaiting Will’s instruction, was baffling. However, he also found that it made his whole body hot with desire.

“No, it hadn’t actually.” Will timidly looked down into his bourbon, “You’d let me do that?”

“‘Let’ implies I am conceding to some defeat rather than an experience that I wholeheartedly covet the opportunity in which to partake and one that will assuredly deliver me the utmost pleasure.” Hannibal repositioned himself so they were side by side.

“I guess I just assumed I’d always be the one…” Will trailed off before he could say something stupid or phrase anything crudely enough to make Hannibal wrinkle his nose in distaste.

“Oh, Will,” Hannibal downed the rest of his drink and rolled his eyes with a sigh, head dipping back onto the couch, “I fear that you have been laboring amongst the unimaginative philistines in the confined, shallow waters of heteronormativity for far too long, caged in convention. What possesses one to impose such limitations? To box oneself in like that? Did it not bore you to tears?”

His words were running together a little, and his trains of thought were leaving holes for Will to point out. It made him smile. He knew Hannibal wouldn’t let just anyone see him like this, and the fact that he had submitted to Will’s request for it made his heart feel full.

“Well, if I’d known you like to get all gender studies professor when you knock back a few, I would have packed my Butler and Foucault. We don’t live in a label-less society, Hannibal. Someday maybe. Hopefully. But until then, operating under labels is more something that’s inescapable rather than a choice.”

“You are quite correct, Will.”

“More to the point though, that’s not why I thought you wouldn’t…” Will failed to finish his sentence yet again, choosing instead to retrieve his drink from the table and finish it in one gulp. Holding out his hand for Hannibal’s glass, he got off the couch. Hannibal handed it to him, and Will walked over to the bar to refill them.

“You cannot even bear to say it. You keep acquiring copious sexual courage only to retreat again. I cannot seem to accurately venture a guess as to what will still cause you humiliation in this stage. Why don’t I do it for you and spare you the indignity this time?” Hannibal was grinning in a way that was entirely too silly. It was almost unsettling to see on such a normally austere face.

Will handed him a half full tumbler and sat down next to him.

“I would have no qualms about you fucking me whenever you want to, Will. In fact, I can hardly articulate the level of ecstatic expectancy I have for such an occurrence. Trust that I want you inside me as much as I want to be inside you again.” Hannibal whispered in his ear close enough for his lips to brush Will’s skin.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Hannibal. If you want me to hold up my end of the cease and desist agreement for tonight, you can’t say shit like that.” Will leaned his head against the back of the couch, eyes fluttering closed. Those words coming out of Hannibal’s mouth were unbearably filthy. He thought about being inside Hannibal, looking into his eyes while surrounded by his slick heat, and it felt like every ounce of blood within him was rushing down between his legs.

“Yes, I’m currently rethinking that proclamation. Having trouble erasing all those glorious suggestions of yours from my mind.” Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s ear, tongue flicking his earlobe.

“Am I going to have to be one exercising restraint here? Because I have to say, I don’t really have your talent for it.” Will moaned softly and brought his free hand to rest on Hannibal’s cheek, pulling him in for a kiss.

“It was your idea to ply me with alcohol. Need I remind you that I was living in involuntary sobriety up until very recently and now have a greatly diminished tolerance for such things?”

“I probably should have thought about that. Well, you seem to be doing well enough anyway.” Will laughed.

“So many obvious facts are not occurring to you today. Jack Crawford would be appalled at your detective skills, Mr. Graham.” Hannibal smiled and took a sip from his glass.

“I think it’s safe to say that’s the lowest on the list of things Jack would be appalled by if he saw us right now.” Will kissed him again, slinging his legs over Hannibal’s so he was halfway situated in his lap again.

“What would you do if he were to stroll in right now?” Hannibal looked suddenly serious, like confirmation that Will would do the right thing was a very grave matter.

Will looked back with an equally solemn expression.

“Whatever needed to be done.”

Hannibal tilted his head, eyes roving over Will’s face skeptically.

“And if anyone else found us right now? Alana, Molly, anyone else to whom you have had emotional attachments in the recent past?”

“I wouldn’t let anyone ruin this, Hannibal, but I don’t think the only way to deal with something like that happening would be to immediately kill them.”

“No? Do tell.” Hannibal’s voice had turned icy, and his eyes were hardened with something akin to spite that made Will instantly regret his idea to end this day with an alcohol binge. Maybe drunk Hannibal was even more formidable than sober Hannibal. Maybe alcohol stripped away his mercy and already slim moral code to leave something more feral and terrifying than Will could imagine. Maybe messing with his control wasn’t the smartest move. After all, it had been instituted by him for a reason.

“You knocked Alana out so she wouldn’t find out about Abigail and Nicholas Boyle. You kept Miriam Lass drugged and confused for two years without her ever figuring out who you were. If it came down to it, yes, I would do *anything* that was necessary, but obviously I would prefer not to have to hurt someone like Alana. You matter to me above everything else. You *are* everything else. I’ll protect that however I have to.” Will tried to keep his voice as steady as possible. He knew Hannibal would be looking for cracks in his resolve.

“As will I. And if events unfolded to require action in which you were unwilling to participate,” Hannibal clasped Will’s hand and looked at him, eyes softer now, “I would take care of it myself.”

“Really?” Will exhaled a breath he didn’t know he had been holding in.

“Yes. I would not wish to inflict further trauma. I know how your empathy haunts you. But I need to make sure you would not interfere. I promise I would do it as quickly and painlessly as possible.”

“No, I wouldn’t try to stop you. Some things are necessary even if you wish they weren’t. And thank you, Hannibal.” Will said quietly as gruesome scenarios that he hoped to never be confronted with flickered across his mind.

“May I ask you something else, Will?” Hannibal looked oddly tentative in a way Will wasn’t sure he had ever seen from him.

“Yeah, of course. I feel like I’m usually the one asking all the questions so go ahead.”

“After we killed Dolarhyde, in the moments before you took us into the depths of the sea, did I correctly read in your expression, among other things, arousal? Did you want to do more

than hide your face in my sweater at that moment?"

Will sighed and looked out the backdoor into the dark country night. The empty, swarming blackness boxing them in reminded him of clawing their way out of the ocean. He took a large mouthful of bourbon and swished it around in his mouth before swallowing.

"Yeah…You, um…Read that correctly." He looked at the floor, at his glass, at the fire, anywhere but Hannibal.

"You killed a man with me and all you wanted to do right afterwards was ravage me there on the blood-soiled ground. You are positively wicked indeed." Hannibal's voice was mellifluous and playful, the bourbon softly rounding out the edges of his words. He wasn't being mocking or rude. He was teasing him the way Will normally would, but Will found that he couldn't follow suit. "Will? Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Will tried to flash him a smile, but it faded almost as soon as it hit his lips, "No…I don't know."

"You were horrified by that. Disgusted with your own urges." Hannibal pushed his fingers through Will's hair, but he didn't force Will to meet his gaze.

"Yeah, it felt…I don't know. Somehow it was worse than just enjoying killing him with you. It made me feel…"

"Like you were a sick, twisted person to be pitied, a psychopath undeserving of compassion to be studied with revulsion by people like your former pupils at the academy?"

"God, Hannibal! Please, feel free to pile onto the self-loathing." Will scooted off Hannibal's lap.

"I'm sorry, Will. I was not trying to make you feel worse. I only wanted to ascertain whether or not my perception of your feelings was accurate." He placed a hand under Will's chin and turned his face toward him, "Sex and death are very interconnected, as are pain and pleasure. They will always be associated in our mind, drawn together by a nearly imperceptible line of division. It is natural to think about doing that which makes us feel most alive after witnessing the life leaving the body of another. There is nothing wrong with you, Will. Continue to embrace it and shun repression. By now, I believe you know that nothing good comes from the latter. You will not eradicate that which discomfits you by burying it deeper. It will only service to build you toward a volcanic eruption which in turn will horrify you again and the cycle begins anew. Nothing gained, nothing resolved."

"So what you're saying is maybe don't fling us both off a cliff the next time I'm deeply ashamed of myself?" Will was stone faced until he reached the end of his sentence and heard how ridiculous it sounded, like something that couldn't possibly be real. It had to be a fever dream except that it wasn't. Not at all. He broke out into a laugh that sounded a bit deranged at first, the cackle of someone clearly teetering on the edge of sanity, before tapering off into a childlike giggle. He set down his glass as he recovered from the mild hysteria.

“Yes, preferably a small, grassy hill off which we can quickly rebound next time.” Hannibal smiled at him and leaned in for a kiss. “I love you, darling Will. I do not want you to be plagued by yourself any longer. You are not alone anymore, and it is my aim for you to never be again.”

“I love you too, Hannibal.” Will smiled back at him before planting a few light kisses on his cheeks and lips. “So let’s recap. In some twist of fate, I behaved like a totally normal tipsy person tonight, while you,” He tapped a playful finger on Hannibal’s sternum, “Got horny enough to almost disobey your own orders, said ‘fuck’, *eye-rolled* me before going on a rant about heteronormativity, teased me for wanting to have sex with you right after we murdered someone...Any other gems I’m missing for the highlights reel?”

“No, I believe you have collected all the best moments for posterity.” Hannibal laughed and gave Will a longing look, his eyes glittering from the light of the fire. He looked so peaceful and in love. Will wished he could take a picture of this moment. “Let us retire for the evening before I commit some truly dreadful sin of misconduct for you to lord over my head for the rest of our days. Or before I fuck you into the floorboards against my better judgment, whichever comes first.”

Hannibal looked at Will with a passion that was balanced precariously between appealing and dangerous.

“Is it weird that I’m super proud I can make it difficult for you to control yourself just by existing?” Will smirked and took a last sip of bourbon before abandoning his glass.

“Not at all. You damn well *should* be proud of that.” Hannibal smiled with a mischievous gleam in his eye before tossing back the rest of his drink, rising from the couch and extending a hand to Will to lead him to their bed.

The next morning, he was only minutely fuzzy mentally and somewhat fatigued. Hannibal had forced a grumbly, sullen Will who wanted nothing more than to fling himself onto the sheets face down to drink water and take some sort of supplement (he didn’t bother asking what was contained in the pill Hannibal proffered), thereby saving him from a more traditional hangover.

Hannibal made delicious omelets with the leftover beef bourguignon that had Will practically moaning and salivating like one of his dogs intently watching his every move when he brought home a particularly bountiful catch from the river. After that exceptional breakfast and a couple cups of coffee, he felt more alert, nearly all mental delays from alcohol induced

sleep melting away as his mind sharpened with new thoughts that both excited and unnerved him. Resolutions were taking shape in Will's mind, and the frank confrontation with the darkness that was contained within them felt like something he could not come back from once he decreed them to be true. Still, the excitement of things to come was outweighing any trepidation.

Opening the sliding glass door, Will walked onto the porch and set his coffee mug down on the wooden table. It was overcast but warm, a subtle breeze rustling through the trees. He sat down in one of the chairs and looked out toward the lake, watching a couple ducks padding along the edge. Hannibal came out a moment later, sliding the door closed and taking a seat in the opposite chair. He opened a book held in his right hand and crossed his legs, leaning back to settle into a comfortable reading position.

"Hannibal?" Will looked at him a little reticently. He wasn't sure if he should give him some time to relax before sallying forth into something so intense. *Or maybe I'm just stalling.*

"Something on your mind, Will? You are wearing that charmingly pensive expression which highlights your features so very well." Hannibal smiled encouragingly and closed his book. Will loosened his facial muscles and relaxed back in his chair.

"Last night…I think your resistance to starting anything sexual wasn't just about you worrying about me not being aware of my limits. I think you're a little afraid of yours. Or maybe not afraid exactly, but wary and unsure where they lie and whether or not they'll fall within an area that I'm comfortable with. But I'm not totally sure what that means. Why are you still restraining yourself? I appreciate you being careful with me, I do, especially since it was what I needed at first. But that said, it would be nice to see you lose control too, and I hope you know you can. It feels like you're holding back. I see it when you look at me sometimes." Will tried to meet Hannibal's gaze, but Hannibal was staring off into the distance, looking lost in thought.

"You know not what you ask for." Hannibal turned to look at Will. His eyes darkened, but it wasn't lustful. It was a warning. "Just as a champagne cork can never again caress the lips of the bottle once released from its glass prison, release the beast here and you may never be able to coerce him back into the cage."

"I don't want to cage you."

"No, but you may not be able to weather storms you have not yet seen and whose all-consuming potency you perhaps do not comprehend as well as you think you do."

"Try me." Will looked back, audacious and sure of himself.

Hannibal swallowed, eyes skimming Will's face. It seemed like he was searching for a sign of weakness, a crevasse in his determination. Will stared back unflinching.

"I have a talent for restraint and mitigation, one that has been honed for decades out of necessity, carved with a deliberate and steady hand like a sculptor spending years on his masterpiece. I am not certain I can activate that once I am allowed to have you with… Unhindered access. I do not wish to hurt you or take more from you than you have to give or

are willing to give, but part of me does want to tear you open and see what's inside. I suppose I always will to some degree, both metaphorically and otherwise."

"So pick up your mallet and get to work, Dr. Lecter." Will could feel his pulse quickening, but he took deep, deliberate breaths, trying to control his response. He didn't want to give Hannibal the satisfaction of seeing him waver.

"My hunger for you is bottomless and terrible, a swirling eddy of great force which has always tested the limitations of my control, the edges swelling like air bubbles ready to burst in a vein and destroy with such subtle cruelty. You should not say such things to me."

"I'm not afraid."

"Yet you know that you should be, don't you?" There it was. That tilted head, cold, inhuman look of curiosity. Will was certain now that curiosity was Hannibal's fatal flaw, especially when it came to matters pertaining to Will.

"I know, but I trust you. You won't go too far." *I want you to consume me, chase everything out of my head and replace it with you. I want to float away from myself and watch from above.* Will felt like he would faint if he stood up at that moment, like he had been drugged by the sheer force of his craving for Hannibal.

"My, how you continue to flourish like a root bursting through the sidewalk with no regard for the concrete impediment resting above its fragile head. I have the utmost esteem for your perseverance, but I must remind you that it is possible for one to want something for which they are not yet ready." Hannibal was swelling with pride, but there was still a shade of foreboding to his voice, a reminder that he was not a person to be trifled with.

"I think you underestimate the as yet undiscovered predilections I may have. I think you also underestimate me in general." Will swallowed hard.

"Do I? Please enlighten me." His tone was an odd mixture of inquisitiveness, ridicule, and admiration that made Will uneasy. It seemed unpredictable and volatile.

"As you correctly pointed out yesterday, the carnal is intertwined with death and consumption…What if I could satisfy your hunger in a way you would never dream I could offer? Give you something you've always wanted while still ensuring that it wouldn't be too much? Something that you would never ask me for but that I know you most definitely think about and in fact hinted at in this very conversation." He searched Hannibal's face and found no recognition. Will took a moment to enjoy the heady victory of dangling an obscured concept in front of Hannibal without him discovering it just yet. He felt seductive and compelling, and Will realized it was maybe the first time he fully understood why he had captured Hannibal's interest so acutely and unshakably all these years. Normally, Will's confidence in himself didn't match Hannibal's belief in him, but his self-assurance was rising more and more each day like the tide enveloping the shore and flooding everything in its path.

Hannibal didn't speak for a minute, only held Will's gaze with an intimidating concentration, but Will stayed strong and unblinking.

“Will…I must confess that I cannot seem to construe the particulars of your meaning. Would you care to impart some specificity to your intimations?”

“I want to give you a present before we leave to start our new life.”

“You do?”

“Yes…I want you to eat part of me, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! I'm curious to see how people take this one. I was worried about striking the right balance of fluff and darkness with the drunk conversation (and also keeping them in character while still making them seem a little drunk).

And now, away I go to work on chapter seven! That one is kicking my ass a little bit so far.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> So this turned out to be so. much. smut. Sorry about that. But also not sorry? :P This one is unbeta-ed so any mistakes are my own (feel free to point them out so I can correct them!). As always, much thanks to all you lovelies who read and comment. When I was feeling a bit stuck while writing this chapter, getting new comments gave me renewed energy and confidence and really helped me push through. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will didn't think he had ever seen Hannibal this emotional. There were hints of it in the days leading up to the night they were to make their escape several years ago. When he spoke of Mischa and of Abigail then, the veneer slipped willingly, and he was perhaps the most "normal" Will had ever seen him in terms of what people are accustomed to judging as a "proper" emotive response. Likewise, when Hannibal uncovered Will's betrayal, his face twisted with an agony and fury that was completely naked and transparent. He had been very emotionally honest with Will since they arrived at the safe house, but he still seemed to be very much in control of his responses and when he deigned to divulge them. Now it looked like he was reacting before his thoughts could catch up and enable him to process what Will had said.

"Hannibal?" Will wasn't sure what he had expected, but Hannibal staring off into space, glassy-eyed and chest heaving, wasn't exactly it.

"Will, I – " Hannibal heaved a sigh and ran a hand over his face, "How, pray tell, did you envision this occurring? And are you quite certain that you are not still impaired from last night's over-indulgence?"

"I thought you'd take an organ I don't need to function. Spleen, gallbladder, something like that. You…" Hannibal still had not turned back to look at him, and it was making Will second guess everything, "You could cook it and savor me however you wanted, and then you would have a piece of me inside you without having to wonder anymore what it would be like. I *know* you can do it and do it while inflicting minimal pain. Knowing you, I'm betting there's a hidden hatch in that floor somewhere that leads to a fully equipped basement. I don't believe for a second that your safe house wouldn't have provisions for kills. Prepared for all outcomes, right? And no, *I'm not still drunk.* Give me some credit here. I'm not just speaking off the cuff."

When Hannibal finally turned to look at him, his eyes were moist with unshed tears not quite yet fat enough to leak down his cheeks.

“Darling Will, this is…most unexpected and possibly the most beautiful, courageous gesture of surrender I could imagine, but…” Hannibal shook his head and reached across the table to take Will’s hand, “I cannot permit you to allow such a thing, especially in your only recently restored condition. You have no need to prove your allegiance or love to me with such a gracious, selfless sacrifice. This is not necessary.”

“I know it’s not *necessary,* but was it *necessary* that we try to kill each other several times over, that you send Francis after Molly and Walter to remind me how much I belong to you, that I toss us off a cliff?! And as far as my health is concerned, I think if I’m healthy enough for us to be fucking, I’m fine. Every injury has settled into a dull ache. I might not possess your extensive medical knowledge, but I’m pretty sure this would be minor, barely invasive surgery, and you’re incredibly skillful. You know what to do, and I trust you to do it. You said we had time? Then we have time for me to recover for another week while you cuddle with me and feed me your ridiculously pretentious albeit exceptionally tasty version of chicken soup.” Will smiled, hoping the mention of tender domestic comforts would soften Hannibal.

“What caused you to arrive at this decision?” Hannibal’s eyes were still wet and red-rimmed, but he looked more relaxed now. It was still a shock to see him so quiet, no eloquent, lecturing speeches laden with meaning escaping his lips. Spurring Hannibal into a speechless state was a feat of epic proportions. He was usually brimming with quippy retorts and long-winded observations at every juncture.

“I genuinely want to do this for you. I know how much it will mean to you, and it doesn’t feel like much of a sacrifice if it’s something my body won’t be using anyway. You’ve made reference in the past to victims serving more of a purpose – ”

“No, Will, please do not mention yourself in reference to – ”

“I know, Hannibal. I know I’m not your victim, and I know you don’t intend for me to ever be. I also know you don’t categorize or view me and my worth in relation to them. I just mean that in an analogous way…I think of this as serving a much greater, more beautiful purpose than it would inside me. When I think about it…” Will looked at the clouds darkening and swirling above them, the currents of air separating and rejoining the clusters of puffy white water vapor as the wind picked up. It looked like rain would descend upon them before the day was through, “I feel love. I just feel this swelling of beauty and pleasure and warmth, and…truth be told…a twinge of what I felt after we killed Dolarhyde.”

Hannibal’s expression slowly morphed into a lustful smirk.

“So that is what brought on this revelation.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” Will laughed, “It got me thinking, and once the idea was planted it just… It wouldn’t go away, and it became more and more attractive with every passing minute. You should be proud. I took your advice; I didn’t choose repression this time.”

“Well, this was not exactly what I had in mind.” Hannibal made a clipped, amused sound and looked back out at the lake.

“Hannibal, we haven’t really delved into the darkness much since we arrived here. Let me reiterate that I appreciate you easing me in more than you know, but it doesn’t mean I’ve forgotten that it’s there. I thought this was the best possible sign of good faith I could give you that I haven’t just embraced the easier parts of being with you. I crave the ugly, dirty, painful, scary parts too. I think before you I had a very cookie-cutter, idealized image of what love was supposed to look like. You completely reshaped those ideas. It can be dark and horrifying, and sometimes that’s beautiful too. It is to me. I don’t just want candlelit, quiet evenings on the back porch. I want it all, bones and dirt and blood included, and I need you to know that.” Will squeezed Hannibal’s hand.

“And it appears that instead of immersing a cautious toe to allow for acclimation, you prefer to jump across the chasm.” Hannibal regarded Will seriously.

“When have we ever done anything else? Our days here have been the first time we’ve ever slowed the pace and taken time to hash out everything in the open, and it’s been great. Perfect, in fact. I think we needed to finally stop dancing around the perimeter and trying to out-intellectualize each other so that we could really figure out what it is we both want, but I don’t see a reason to keep it that slow forever. And I also don’t see a reason why we can’t still be gradual with some things while taking the plunge elsewhere. You know, your reaction honestly isn’t what I expected.”

“You imagined I would be salivating at the chance and thrust headlong into the void without care or consideration for the aftermath?”

“Well, no…But also yes.” Will eyed him sheepishly, the fingers of his free hand twitching in his lap.

“As we have discussed, I would rather not repeat any impulsivity when it comes to you. I do not wish for you to leave, and I do not want to give you any reason to if it can be avoided.”

“You won’t. I’m the one offering this. It’s my idea, and it isn’t the result of any suggestion you’ve planted through subterfuge.” Will got up from his chair and walked over to crouch next to Hannibal, resting both hands on his knee. Perhaps it was a bit of a manipulatively submissive pose for Will to choose at this crucial moment, but he hadn’t intended for it to be.

Hannibal looked down at Will’s entreating eyes and ran a cautious hand through his hair.

“I am afraid you are making those sultry, imploring eyes at me again. Your ‘please’ face really is maddeningly beguiling, Will. I believe it will bring about my doom before all is said and done someday, but it will not sway me in this case.” Hannibal smiled, and it was full of admiration despite his refusal.

Will opened his mouth to protest, and Hannibal placed gentle fingers over his lips.

“Before you launch into a rebuttal, allow me to explain. Firstly, I am entirely correct about your condition. While you are an incurably stubborn boy and always will be I expect, I know you have grasped this truth because your intellect overpowers your intractability and brings you back to rationality in the end. You are not a rash person by nature as you live too internally to do so, your brain occupied with far too much over-analyzing for you to willfully

ignore such things. I need you as healthy and agile as possible when we make our next move. I will not tolerate you knowingly putting your body at reckless risk for the sake of giving me a gift that, while it moves me more than I could possibly begin to elucidate with mere words, is completely extraneous. Now, besides all the matters of practicality, I selfishly wish to present you with such opulence and grandeur that is unmatched by any tableau which I have constructed in the past for such a purpose. Come here." Hannibal patted his thighs to indicate for Will to sit, and Will obeyed, settling into Hannibal's lap and slinging his arms around his neck.

Hannibal nuzzled into Will's neck, teeth scraping lightly as he made his way up to Will's ear.

"I am sure that you will be the most divine dish I have ever been blessed to caress with my tongue, and you deserve to be savored and given the utmost reverence. It should be like praying to the most ancient and powerful forces of this world, a sensuous event to mark down in blood sourced ink on the pages of history itself, a work of art to inspire for decades to come, and I will accept nothing less. I would plate you with such care and fastidious attention on the finest, most elegant porcelain, and I would need time to scrupulously etch the inspiration from my mind to be absolutely certain that I had heard the muses correctly. I cannot accomplish that here and now. Do you understand?"

Will whimpered and crumpled a fistful of Hannibal's shirt. His cock was painfully hard, and he found that he didn't care. Fuck repression. The thought of sitting across from Hannibal at a sophisticated, meticulously designed table setting and watching Hannibal eat part of him, eyes closed in deferential bliss, was so arousing he almost cried out.

"Do you think we would even make it to the bedroom after I devoured you?" Hannibal stroked Will's cock through his pants.

"No. We'd fuck right on the table." Will kissed Hannibal hard, moaning into his mouth.

"And ruin my gorgeous table that I took such care to prepare in great detail? Terribly rude, Mr. Graham. What's to be done about that?" Hannibal smirked and roughly pulled Will forward, grinding their hips together.

"I'm sure that you're capable of devising an appropriate punishment, Hannibal." Will grinned and nipped at Hannibal's lips, "Speaking of which…we should go inside."

"Yes, I think that while I cannot bestow upon you the gift which you sought today, I can certainly provide you with a number of very satisfactory alternatives in the interim." Hannibal kissed him once more before lifting him off his lap and standing.

He opened the back door and stepped aside, gesturing for Will to walk through first.

Will giggled a little as he walked toward the staircase. He felt marginally scandalous heading to bed with Hannibal. There was still an impish thrill to it, almost as though he dared someone to come find them and openly shout their repugnance just so he could luxuriate in it like some rebellious fuel. Like he *wanted* everyone to know *this is who I am, this is who I love, and I don't care if it disgusts you. In fact, I almost hope it does.*

“You have been so uncharacteristically mirthful as of late.” Hannibal snaked an arm around Will’s waist and lightly kissed his neck. “I would very much like for it to remain so for as long as possible.”

“Me too.” Will twisted around in Hannibal’s arms, trying and failing to kiss him while ascending the stairs backwards. He stumbled into the railing, and Hannibal caught him with his ever disturbingly swift hands.

“You are determined to hurt yourself today, it seems.” Hannibal turned Will around, causing a tiny whine of protest from the younger man as he hurried up the stairs.

As soon as he reached the top, he spun around again and forcefully grabbed Hannibal, backing them both toward the bed.

“Have I told you how utterly gratifying it is to see you like this? So insatiable that you cannot bear to stop touching me even for a single second,” Hannibal whispered in his ear as he undid the buttons of Will’s shirt, both of them collapsing into a tangled heap of limbs on the bed.

“I think you’ve mentioned it once or twice,” Will laughed, wriggling out of his shirt and making quick work of the buttons on Hannibal’s, “I could say the same for you, you know.”

“Mmm, one can hardly blame me, perfect as you are,” Hannibal hummed into Will’s chest as he kissed his way down, undoing Will’s pants and pulling them off along with his boxers in one fell swoop. Hannibal moved to stand at the foot of the bed and surveyed Will’s body with a lustful eye, “Turn over and get on all fours, please.”

Will obeyed, breath quickening in anticipation as he heard the zipper of Hannibal’s pants and the rustle of clothes falling to the floor. He felt a hand rest on his ass, fingers trailing down the curve as delicately as a breeze whispering across his skin, bringing goosebumps to the surface of his sensitive flesh. Will felt the mattress dip as Hannibal knelt between his legs, but to Will’s surprise, he didn’t feel a caressing, probing finger parting his cheeks but instead a warm mouth leaving a series of kisses, soft tongue darting out ever so briefly to trace the curve of his ass.

“Mmm, what are you doing?” Will lazily looked over his shoulder.

“All will be revealed in good time. Move a little farther up the bed for me, please.” Hannibal leaned back to watch Will. “Spread your legs.”

Will complied, knees sliding across the comforter.

“Farther. Don’t be shy, Will.”

Will pushed his thighs apart and blushed a deep maroon as he thought about what he probably looked like from this angle, what Hannibal could see, what he *wanted* to see. He was so exposed and raw, feeling simultaneously self-conscious and desperate to cover up but also wantonly overtaken by exhibitionism. He couldn’t believe how much he wanted to show off for Hannibal right now. He had never been like that with anybody else. Never even liked having sex with the lights on, preferring to conceal as much as he could as though the

darkness would help him disappear from anything he disliked about himself. Will imagined fingering himself open for Hannibal, mouth slack as Hannibal watched him greedily, pinning him with those dark, ravenous eyes and offering erotic whispers of encouragement.

“Good boy. You are undeniably stunning like this, presenting the most intimate parts of your body at my behest. Tell me, are you embarrassed to be on display for me right now?” Hannibal pressed worshipful kisses near the base of Will’s spine.

“Yes, but I like it. I like showing you, and the embarrassment just turns me on more honestly.” Will gazed diffidently over his shoulder.

“Let’s harness that titillating sense of mortification then, shall we? Don’t look at me right now. Face the headboard.”

Will obeyed, pulse beating thickly in his ears as his heart raced in anticipation. Not being able to see what was happening was a rousing relinquishment of power. He sensed that whatever Hannibal had planned was new. Will felt strong fingers pulling apart his cheeks, and he sucked in a nervous breath as agonizing seconds passed. He was sure Hannibal was drawing it out on purpose. Just as he was about to disobey his orders and crane his neck around to sneak a glimpse, he felt hot wetness laving over his entrance in broad, flat strokes.

“*Oh.* Hannibal, you – ” Will gasped as his hands gave out underneath him. He landed on his forearms, head slumping forward on the pillows. He wasn’t sure what he had been trying to say. He didn’t want Hannibal to stop, but god, it was such an intolerably obscene thing. That mixture of shame and pleasure was roiling inside him, making his cock heavy and painting his skin with a deepening flush. “You don’t have to – ”

Hannibal switched his movements to quick, short laps that made Will moan and bury his face deeper in the bed.

“I can assure you I am not doing this out of some sense of obligation. That is not what is bothering you though, is it?”

“N-no.”

“You feel it is almost appalling for you to enjoy such a thing, yes?”

“*Yes.”*

“But you like that aspect of it, do you not?” Hannibal circled the skin around his entrance with a fingertip, but didn’t approach it.

“*Yes, I do.* But I don’t think I’ll be ashamed of it for very long.” Will lifted his head a bit, turning to the right to take a few steadying breaths.

“Yes, I suspect that assessment is quite accurate. We will have to keep to a strict schedule of escalation tactics to see to your satisfaction, won’t we? I would not want you to grow bored.”

Will was still dutifully not looking at Hannibal, but he could hear the smug smile in his voice.

“I don’t think boredom is something we’ll ever be in danger of.”

“Not if I have any say in the matter, no.”

Hannibal’s warm tongue set to work again, teasing and stroking, slicking and opening him. Will was panting and moaning freely now, hips pushing back onto Hannibal’s mouth. The tip of his tongue pushed past the tight ring of muscle ever so slightly, and Will slipped forward onto the bed, arms collapsing completely.

“Fuck…your tongue feels so damn good. *Please don’t stop.*”

Hannibal kept licking him in long, measured laps, varying his pace and pressure at unpredictable intervals so Will never knew what to expect. Will was somehow both exhilarated and languid, his body shaky and fluid as he struggled to keep his lower half upright. When Hannibal moved from his position a few minutes later, trailing kisses up his back, Will gratefully collapsed his hips into the mattress and basked in the pressure of Hannibal’s body weighing him down as he came to rest with his chest pressed against Will’s back.

“Always such a very good boy for me, Will. So malleable and at the ready for new exploration. Is it your curiosity or your ever expanding appetite that outweighs reservation these days?” Hannibal licked and bit Will’s neck and ear.

“Do you know how fucking hard it makes me every time you call me that?” Will took Hannibal’s hand in his and guided it to his leaking cock.

“I am aware, but I certainly don’t mind the demonstration.” Hannibal rolled his hips against Will’s ass, his own hardening length nudging against his entrance.

“You know, I used to dream about this when you were away.”

“The subconscious betrays our true feelings whether or not it pleases us to confront them. When we are asleep, it has free reign to show us that which we have eschewed and buried in the black recesses of our mind during the waking hours. Tell me, did you touch yourself when you woke from these dreams?” Hannibal gave Will’s cock a firm squeeze, pumping his hand for a few strokes.

“No, not at first,” Will gasped, thrusting into Hannibal’s hand, “I was too ashamed. Too upset by it. I felt like such a fraud…Living with Molly and thinking about you. I think that’s why aahh,” Will moaned as Hannibal picked up speed, fingertips sliding over the head of his hard length, “That’s why it’s been such a quick evolution since we got here. I was just so fucking tired of denying it. I didn’t have the energy to do it anymore especially since…Where did it ever get me?”

“Right back here. Back to me.” Hannibal released Will’s cock and brusquely rolled him onto his back, claiming his mouth in an almost jarring kiss.

“Do you feel up for exerting yourself or have I made you too relaxed already?” Hannibal murmured into Will’s neck.

“Anything you want, Hannibal. Anything at all.”

“If you had made such a declaration only a day ago, I am not sure I would have believed in the extent of the veracity and aggregate commitment of it. But I would be a fool not to take such words at face value after this morning, wouldn’t I?” Hannibal pulled back to look at Will. The astonishment and depth of the potential that he now truly grasped was written in his eyes.

“Yes, you would.”

Hannibal reached into the nightstand. His hand emerged with the lube and a condom which he gently placed in Will’s palm.

“*Oh.*” Will breathlessly sighed.

“Unless it does not interest you?” Hannibal tilted his head, observing Will intently as was his custom.

“Oh, it definitely, definitely does…I just…I’m always worried about disappointing you when we do anything new where it will be painfully obvious I have zero idea what I’m doing. I’m sure you’ve had much more skilled – ”

“Will, no one compares to you. No other being has delivered a fraction of the pleasure you have granted me from even the smallest, seemingly insignificant gestures of affection. Immediate mastery is not necessary nor does it factor into my enjoyment of every touch I receive from you. Do you not find that the blistering heat coursing within you, the way you quiver at my hands and my lips, is more due to the ferocity of our unbreakable union than the commonplace nature of skin joining skin? Another man probing inside you with eager fingers would not garner the same response, would it?”

“No, it definitely wouldn’t.”

“Then I hope your stress is assuaged. I relish the opportunity to watch you blossom and discover yourself anew in this way. I am aware of what a precious, rare gift it is. You have no need to worry about disappointing me, dear Will.” Hannibal smiled and combed his fingers through Will’s hair.

“Ok. Good to hear.” Will smiled back, appeased for the moment. “Um…Get on your back for me then?”

Hannibal silently followed instructions, rolling off Will to rest beside him.

Will crawled down the bed and moved to a sitting position between Hannibal’s legs. He dropped the lubricant and condom down next to him and hesitated for a moment.

“I sense that you are considering a particular option?”

“Yeah…But I don’t want you to think I’m asking to avoid doing it myself. It’s just kind of a mouthwatering image so I really want to see it if that’s alright.”

“What would you like to see, Will?” Hannibal’s tone was alluring and sweet. He wasn’t pressing Will to confess unwillingly, just gently urging him on.

Will picked up the lube and handed it back to Hannibal.

“Will you finger yourself open for me?”

Hannibal grinned cunningly and opened the bottle, coating a finger without taking his eyes off Will. Will watched with rapt attention as Hannibal drew his knees up and spread his legs, reaching between them to lightly circle his entrance with the pad of his finger before slowly pushing inside. After a few seconds, he slicked and inserted another finger, a soft groan escaping his mouth as he opened himself with care. Will ran his hands up and down Hannibal’s strong thighs, torn between the urge to look at Hannibal’s face or watch those dexterous fingers move in and out as Hannibal prepared himself for Will exactly as requested.

“Take a breath, Will.”

“W-what?” Will exhaled a burst of pent up air. Seeing Hannibal so submissive and compliant, shamelessly showing off for him just like Will had done only minutes ago, was such a devastatingly erotic sight that Will had forgotten to breath. “Fuck…I…Hannibal, seeing you like this is almost too much. You look so amazing right now.”

“I knew you would come to understand how attractive it can be to break free of the imprisonment of strict roles. Such a delicious cornucopia of options spreads before you if you keep distinctions boundless, not to mention the opportunity for tantalizing surprises to both your partner and yourself as you uncover truths about your desires that might have otherwise lain dormant.” Hannibal was somehow still so controlled as he touched himself, his face reddening and his eyes half-lidded, but breath and voice stable as though he was completing any daily perfunctory task. Will decided that wouldn’t do.

“How does it feel?” Will kissed and tenderly bit Hannibal’s inner thighs, eyes trained on his the entire time.

“Mmm, I bet it would feel infinitely better if it were your fingers.” Hannibal smirked and thrust his fingers in harder, breath finally quickening.

“Do you want something, Hannibal?” Will asked coolly, head tilted ever so slightly.

“You are such an admirable pupil, aren’t you? Look how easily you settle into exploring a new role. I want your fingers inside me, Will. I want you to know what I feel like. Map and memorize every part of me. Nothing left untouched.” Hannibal withdrew his fingers and reached for Will’s hand, guiding it to where he wanted it.

Will pushed a tentative finger in and found no resistance. Hannibal was slippery and silky with lube, and Will moaned, enjoying the tight yet resilient wet heat of Hannibal around him. He gradually pushed in another, still nervous about hurting Hannibal despite how easily he was slipping into him. Will tilted forward to hover above him, balancing on his forearm, chests not quite touching.

“You feel so good, Hannibal. So warm and tight. I can’t believe you’re letting me touch you like this. Show me how to touch that perfect spot inside you?”

“Curl your fingers forward and stroke until you feel a bulbous – ” Hannibal moaned as Will’s fingers grazed over his prostate.

“I think I found it.” Will grinned and leaned in to kiss him.

“Massage it with your fingertips moving towards the outside, like you’re beckoning someone to you.”

Will did as he was told, and Hannibal’s groaning response was more than rewarding.

“Well, at least we know I can do that right.”

“Now, why don’t you try it with your cock instead?” Hannibal growled in his ear, sucking and biting his earlobe.

“Look who’s impatient now.” Will laughed and thrust his fingers in roughly.

“I’m allowed a little impatience after all this time,” Hannibal gasped out, echoing Will’s earlier words.

“Please, Will.” Hannibal lovingly stroked the back of Will’s neck and fixed him with a gaze that was so close to begging it made him want to weep.

Will reluctantly removed himself from Hannibal’s comforting embrace and crouched back between his legs, his heart palpitating as his nerves amassed into a buzzing coil threatening to burst from his chest. He took a breath and unwrapped the condom, fumbling a little as he unrolled it down his shaft. Opening the lube, he rubbed his now sheathed erection with an even coat of the sticky substance, unsure if he had used too little or not enough. Will awkwardly held his hand away from his body, not knowing what to do with the excess clinging to his fingers. Without a word, Hannibal opened the nightstand drawer and tossed Will a small towel.

“I’m glad at least one of us knows how to prepare,” Will chuckled as he wiped his fingers clean. “How do you…Is this position comfortable for you?”

“Yes, although you may find that elevating my hips with a pillow or two would allow better access.”

“Ok, lift up.”

Hannibal tilted his hips off the bed as Will slid a pillow underneath. Something about hammering out the logistics was making Will edgier, and he wasn’t sure why.

“What is presently drifting through that ever spiraling thought process of yours, Will?”

“I don’t know…I’m kind of internally freaking out about this. I just want to be good for you…” Will trailed off with a shaky sigh. Being allowed to do this to Hannibal almost felt

like a responsibility and one that he didn't take lightly. He felt privileged and didn't want to squander this gift with ineptitude.

Hannibal stroked Will's upper arm, pulling him closer for a pacifying kiss.

"You have been and continue to be. Would you like to hear again just *how* good you've been?"

"I wouldn't exactly call being frozen in fear when you're laid out so nicely for me with exactly zero plausible reasons for hesitation *good*." The words came out at the more frenzied pace of his old self, back when he had first reluctantly started coming to Hannibal and stubbornly refused to cooperate in their sessions. Will shook his head in defeat.

"You have been markedly intrepid at every turn, Will. Why should you feel any inadequacy now? You have always been much too hard on yourself, carrying the weight of so much erroneous responsibility on your shoulders for events which were not under your control. Do not let that seep in now." Hannibal petted Will's hair and cheek.

Will nodded and tried to push away the heavy implications of the past events to which he was alluding.

Not satisfied that Will was relaxing enough, Hannibal changed tactics.

"Perhaps you require a lurid image to distract you? Turn the tides from overthinking back to fervent need?" Hannibal leaned in and whispered in Will's ear, "Don't you care less about possible clumsy beginnings and more about watching me come on my chest while you relentlessly thrust into me? My muscles tightening and squeezing around you as you chase your own release? You can command me to touch myself or not allow me to if you do not wish it yet. Surely the thought of me renouncing all control and yielding to you as you take your pleasure overshadows any doubts you may have about your performance?"

"Damn…You always know what to say." Will moaned and gave Hannibal one last kiss before gathering himself up to try again.

Hannibal scooted down a couple inches and opened his legs again in invitation. Will lined up his cock and took a deep breath before pushing in a tentative inch or two. Placing a hand on either side of Hannibal's waist for leverage, Will gradually pushed in until their bodies were flush, surprised by how easily he glided inside. Will groaned as he drowned in the sensation of being surrounded by Hannibal's damp heat. He finally looked up to meet Hannibal's gaze and melted at the tenderness he saw there.

"Come closer." Hannibal reached a hand out to grasp Will's bicep and tugged him forward.

Will settled with his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, their torsos pressed close together, and rocked his hips forward. They both let out a sigh of relief. Feeling more confident now, Will began to thrust in earnest, short and shallow at first. Hannibal rested his hand on the back of Will's neck. His mouth was slackening as his breath picked up, amber eyes glinting bright and sensual. He kept his eyes locked on Will with an intensity that made him blush.

“How do I feel, Will?”

Will felt a bloom of heat flash through his belly at the sound of Hannibal’s husky voice.

“You feel perfect, Hannibal. You…” Will struggled to form sentences as he moved in and out more insistently. “It’s like I’m meant to fit inside you. Like you’re squeezing me, trapping me, and I don’t want to get away.”

Hannibal kissed him hungrily, moaning into Will’s mouth as their tongues met, hot and urgent.

“It’s not my first time. You don’t have to be gentle with me.” Hannibal broke the kiss and fixed Will with a slightly sinister look.

“What are you saying, Hannibal?” Will replied innocently, struggling not to sound breathless.

“Fuck me like you mean it, Will.” Hannibal nearly snarled, his face twitching in that fearsome way Will knew so well. He had never seen it due to *this* kind of passion though.

“So demanding.” Will clasped both of Hannibal’s wrists and pinned them to the bed on either side of Hannibal’s head and grinned. “I thought this was about me taking my fill and doing what *I* want.”

Hannibal laughed and bucked his hips onto Will’s cock in time with Will’s own thrusts.

“Maybe I need you to remind me.” Hannibal challenged Will with a smirk and tried to wrestle his arms free.

He only elevated them an inch or so before Will slammed them back down into the mattress, fingers curling around Hannibal’s slender wrists with enough force to leave an imprint.

Hannibal threw his head back on the pillow and moaned softly. Will’s mouth descended on Hannibal’s bared throat, sucking and biting until Hannibal’s moans became louder and less restrained. He fucked into him harder, Hannibal’s body sliding up the bed with the force of it. Hannibal wrapped his legs around Will’s waist in a vise grip, clinging to him as best as he could while his arms were still useless.

Will relented and released Hannibal’s wrists, his need to have him close surpassing the pleasure of exercising control over such a dominant man. He curled one arm underneath him, hand cradling Hannibal’s shoulder as the other one tangled in his hair. Hannibal brought an arm around Will’s upper back and reached his free hand down to stroke his swollen, neglected cock.

“I don’t remember telling you to touch yourself,” Will warned, anxious to see if Hannibal had really meant what he said.

Hannibal’s hand stilled and pulled away as he licked his lips, his eyes cloudy with desire and pride.

“God, I think I could watch you like this forever. You look so beautiful, Hannibal.” Will moaned, arousal building to a fever pitch inside him. He knew he wouldn’t last much longer even though he desperately wanted to. Seeing this normally immaculately coifed man flushed and disheveled beneath him, panting, skin glistening with sweat as they moved together, was the most arousing thing Will had ever seen. Hannibal’s head was dangerously close to banging against the headboard, and Will’s hand rose up to cushion it and protect him. Hannibal swatted it away and shook his head.

“You won’t break me, Will. And I’m not entirely sure I wouldn’t welcome my own destruction with open arms even if you did.” Hannibal’s ragged breaths were broken up with stammering moans as Will fucked him harder, letting his hand fall down to Hannibal’s waist to dig into his hips hard enough to bruise.

“Touch yourself. Please,” Will gasped between uneven breaths. He wanted to put it off longer to test Hannibal’s obedience, but he couldn’t fight the climax thrumming through him. It would be any second now.

Hannibal followed his orders, stroking himself in time with Will’s relentless thrusts. The sight of him just unabashedly jerking off at Will’s command was enough to finally send Will over the edge, his body shuddering with wave after wave of pleasure as Hannibal’s muscles clenched around his cock. Hannibal followed soon after, a possessive hand clutching Will’s ass to keep him close as he closed his eyes and spilled onto his chest with a deep groan. Drawing in unsteady gulps of air, Will kissed Hannibal softly before withdrawing and lying on his back. They were both spent, euphorically exhausted as the sweat cooled on their bodies.

Will turned to look at Hannibal, admiring his sex tousled hair, cheeks still tinted pink as his breathing slowly returned to normal.

“Hannibal…I…you…” Will laughed at his inability to string together a complete sentence in his post-coital daze.

“Struggling to find your voice, Will Graham?” Hannibal laughed and turned his head to look at him.

“Yes…I think fucking you almost surgically extracted it somehow. Too many more times may render me mute forever.”

“Hmm, you should not reveal such a truth lest I begin to view silencing your impudent tongue as an attractive prospect. Would make for a less taxing day to day repartee, would it not?” Hannibal quirked a playful eyebrow.

“‘Such discourtesy and so soon after he has been pleased so impeccably,’” Will mocked in his bastardized version of Hannibal’s accent.

“Careful now. You would not want horrendously blundering impressions of me to be the thing that drives me away after all this time.” Hannibal smiled benevolently and kissed Will’s shoulder before leaning over him to retrieve the small towel to clean off his torso. He looked at him for a long moment, and Will was too tired to discern what it meant.

“Everything okay?”

“Yes, vastly beyond okay.” Hannibal’s mouth hung open like he had more to say, but he closed it and turned his gaze back to the ceiling. A few seconds later, he turned back to Will with a slightly puzzled look. “You really are going to allow it, aren’t you?”

Will didn’t grasp his meaning at first, still awash in endorphins.

“*Give,*” Will corrected, “not allow.”

“I believe I have determined how I would like to receive this most gracious gift from my magnanimous benefactor. Or at least, the nature of the conditions under which I would like to receive it.” Hannibal smiled thoughtfully.

“Oh?” Will raised a questioning eyebrow.

“Tomorrow, we decide on our next semi-permanent destination, and when we get there, we christen the house in a very unconventional way as only we could.”

“Our first home cooked meal in our first home?” Will was grinning so hard his cheeks ached.

“I could not dream of a more perfect, heavenly dish to accompany that sentimental milestone, could you?” Hannibal cupped Will’s face and kissed him, slow and sweet.

“No, I don’t think I could.” Will nestled his head into the crook of Hannibal’s arm and curled tightly against his side.

He drifted into a peaceful sleep within minutes, his dreams filled with Hannibal. They were somewhere tropical, the air salty and temperate, an ocean breeze blowing through the fronds of a coconut tree as they sat on a pretty, cherry wood deck overlooking the water. Hannibal looked stylish and at ease lounging in a deck chair, clad in a cream colored suit and white Panama hat. Will stretched out to clasp his hand. Hannibal smiled at him before turning back to watch the waves swallow the sand.

Chapter End Notes

So I hope this chapter didn't seem anti-climactic after the cliffhanger, but I felt it was unrealistic of Hannibal to just go "ok. sure. let's do that right this second." This response felt more true to character for me. And as noted by the end of this chapter, it WILL happen, and you won't have to wait too terribly long.

We're rapidly approaching the end of the safe house days, folks! I'm not sure how quickly updates will come after that since I will want to make sure I have a better researched grasp of where I'm sending them. I'm also not sure if it would be more cohesive to make the post safe house section a part two of a series rather than continuing it under the title of this fic. Feel free to let me know what you think on the subject!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

A few notes about this one. I researched the population breakdown of the country I chose so I promise the remarks about the lack of Americans and English speakers is actually true and not just some xenophobic Westerner assumption!

Second thing, there are a couple character surprises so I am refraining from adding the appropriate tags until a day or two from now so people have a chance to read and be (hopefully) surprised. :D

Lastly, this one is unbeta-ed so any mistakes are my own. Feel free to alert me to them!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once they began, everything moved along in a bustling pace as Hannibal made arrangements for their departure. Unsurprisingly, he had foreign bank accounts under different identities, burner phones ready to be activated, and a whole host of other tools to aid in their disappearance. Fake passports were only the tip of the iceberg. Hannibal extracted everything from the safe and carted it to the study. They both sat behind the ornate, wooden desk and began to comb through the documents piece by piece, Hannibal explaining to Will what would be used when.

“You will have to be careful not to call me by my true name.” Hannibal handed Will a passport.

Will opened it to see an image of Hannibal’s face, the name next to it reading “Patrick Flyte”.

“I’m assuming Patrick for Patroclus, but what about Flyte? It sounds vaguely familiar…”

Hannibal half smiled as he divided the papers into piles and waited patiently to see if Will would divine the reference.

“Wait…No…*No*…That’s too…too…”

“Droll for me?” Hannibal smiled and leaned back in his desk chair, arms behind his head, legs neatly crossed at the ankles.

“*Brideshead Revisited*?! I mean, really?! Why don’t I just cross out ‘Flyte’ and write ‘I get it, we’re gay together.’” Will laughed incredulously.

“There is no need for such crudeness.” Hannibal glowered at Will. “There is much more to the reference than that anyhow. Repression, acceptance, a struggle to find one’s morality and how it fits within the constraints of societal cues, an uninhibited party bringing to the surface

the not yet embraced desires of the other. And yes, a romantic relationship between two men whose non-platonic status is not dependent on sexual consummation to validate its existence. Even greater significance to the comparison has been added since the creation of these passports, events which of course I could not have been privy to at the time since they had not yet come to pass." Hannibal crossed his arms over his chest and gazed off into the distance, his eyes crinkling as though he had just remembered a private joke. "Our dramatic fallout mirrors that of Sebastian and Charles in some ways. You seeking dull, unsatisfactory normalcy to fill the hole in yourself via the procurement of the conventional, predetermined benchmarks of adult life that are marriage and children. Finding yourself unable to stay away and coming back years later."

"You realize that would make you the deteriorating, alcoholic Sebastian, right?" Will said with a wry smile.

"Yes, well…*some ways* is the operative phrase there." Hannibal turned his attention back to the array of now sorted documents strewn across the desk as he added quietly, "Though I suppose I was degrading after a fashion, sobriety notwithstanding."

Will covered one of Hannibal's hands with his palm.

"So was I."

Will kissed Hannibal's temple and ran a hand through his hair.

Hannibal leaned into the touch with a sad little smile.

"I propose a moratorium on any further talk of the past today. Today is about the future."

"Yes. I support this moratorium." Will sat up straighter and focused on the items on the table, his heart catching in his chest at the acknowledgment of just how real this was. "So where are we going?"

"Well, of course nothing is carved in stone, and I would like for this to be a mutual decision, but as I'm sure you have imagined, I do have an idea or two." The corners of Hannibal's mouth quirked up slightly.

"Of course you do. I'm pretty amazed that you haven't broken your self-control and blurted them out and whisked me away in the night yet."

Hannibal sighed in mild exasperation.

"I believe you are the one who has been continually insistent that is it not safe for us to remain in one spot as we have been, dear Will. And I the one delivering reassurances to the contrary."

"Yeah, yeah, just tell me where we're going." Will waved a petulant hand, conceding that Hannibal was annoyingly right as per usual.

"Well, I had thought perhaps Côte d'Ivoire might be a good option. Unfortunately, it is imperative that we avoid Europe to start with due to our history there, and it is also a good

idea to journey as far away as possible at first. West Africa has an advantage of being a very unlikely place for them to look for us, *if* they are looking for us which we must assume for the time being. I speak fluent French, the fishing opportunities will be very much to your liking I think, it's warm there right now although heavy rains and tropical storms are a factor with which to contend, and…" Hannibal turned to Will with a wolfish grin, "if we were to settle on one of the small islands surrounding Abidjan, the most highly populated city, it would only be fifteen or twenty minutes each way by boat. It would make for an easy retreat should we find ourselves in need of quenching our mutual appetites."

Will wet his lips and leaned back in his chair, arms crossed.

"Should we be thinking about that so soon? If they're not looking for us now, they damn well will be when a Ripper scene shows up. I don't care if it is halfway around the world. They'll know."

"There being no extradition treaty with the US, and Côte d'Ivoire being in a part of the world that Americans are pitifully blasé about, that isn't as grave of a concern as you may think. Besides, it would not be a Chesapeake Ripper scene that they find. It would be ours. Something completely new. I can hardly wait to see how it shall manifest, the melding of two ethereal inspirations. We did not have time for that with the Red Dragon which of course is not to discount the glory of that night. The sharp instinct and impassioned spontaneity of it was one of most beautiful events in which I have had the luxury of participating, but I eagerly await the chance to see you truly blossom in this respect." Hannibal cupped Will's cheek, thumb stroking along his new scar.

Will smiled in spite of himself. He wanted to be angry because he still had lingering doubts about getting caught if they killed too soon, but the thought of truly hunting with Hannibal in a carefully plotted way, leisurely biding their time until the right moment, watching that gleam in Hannibal's eye as the monster came alive and unchained, was deliriously exciting. He pictured Hannibal watching him proudly as he sliced into Dolarhyde, and he wanted, *needed* to see that look on his face again.

"What are you thinking, love?" Hannibal's hand migrated to Will's curls.

"Hmm?" Will snapped out of his daydream, not realizing how far into his own head he'd gone, and blushed a little at Hannibal's amorous form of address. He wished he could drum up some term of endearment to reciprocate, but every option always sounded too absurd. "Sorry, I was just thinking about what it would be like. I'm a little worried about disappointing you on that front too. It's akin to going on a casual trail run with an Olympic gold medalist in sprinting. It's probably going to be more intimidating the next time around since I'll have more time to mull it over beforehand."

"You do have a transcendent capacity for self-inflicted mental torture, but I hope that when the time comes, you will realize you have nothing to fear. I will be with you every step of the way, as a guide, a participant, an observer, a teacher, a partner, whatever you need me to be at any given point in time." Hannibal's hand cascaded down Will's back, rubbing his tense muscles.

“That shouldn’t sound as sweet and romantic as it does.” Will smiled and compulsively glanced at Hannibal’s groin before catching himself and averting his eyes.

“Not right now, Will. We must get at least the most rudimentary of tasks done today.” Hannibal smiled in such a way that made it apparent he was lamenting the fact that planning would get in the way of him spreading Will out over the desk right now.

“Mmm, your words say no, but your face kind of suggests you could be persuaded.” Will licked his lips and fixed him with a pleading stare.

Hannibal sighed and shook his head slowly.

“I’m always…amenable to the idea when it comes to you, but I would be grateful if you would refrain from presenting me with any temptation for the next couple hours at least.” Hannibal’s lips twitched like he was fighting a smile as he pointedly turned his gaze away from Will.

Will broke out into peals of laughter.

“What is it now?” Hannibal’s head snapped back to Will with a disapproving look.

“It’s that Hannibal Lecter, epitome of grace and poise, totally gets distracted by wanting to fuck me. You actually just *requested* that I stop dangling the prospect in front of you because it’s *torture*.” Will channeled his inner Southern belle and clutched a hand to his chest dramatically as he said “torture”.

“You are being unpardonably tedious and boorish, and I would be very obliged if you would behave for a little while.” Hannibal was thoroughly incensed, his patience wearing thin.

“Make me.” Will leaned back, both a request and a challenge.

“Is that want you want?” Hannibal said with a calculating tilt of his head.

Will squirmed a little in his chair as he struggled to answer for the boldness he had accidentally stumbled into.

“Yes…I mean, make no mistake, I loved last night. It was indescribably hot to see you more submissive, and I want to do it again. And again and again. But I think I prefer you being the dominant one most of the time…If that’s okay with you.”

“Stand up and face the desk.”

Will did as he was told and awaited further instruction.

“Bend over and place your palms on the desk.” Hannibal got up from his chair and moved to stand behind Will.

“Should I – ”

A sharp, open palmed slap landed across the back of Will's right thigh. Will yelped and jerked forward automatically.

"I don't recall permitting you to speak. You will not speak unless addressed right now. Is that understood?"

"Yes." Will kept his now perspiring palms firmly planted on the desk and resisted the urge to rub the stinging patch of his thigh.

"Yes, what?"

Will chewed the inside of his cheek and thought for a moment before taking a gamble on what Hannibal expected of him.

"Yes, Dr. Lecter. I understand."

"Good boy."

Will felt a hand come to rest on the front of his pants. Hannibal gave Will's half hard cock a quick squeeze through the fabric before undoing the button and zipper of his pants. He reached inside Will's underwear to touch him but didn't remove any of his clothing. Wrapping his other arm around Will's chest to hold him in place, Hannibal leaned forward so they were back to chest.

"If you're very good for me, I'll reward you handsomely but only in the form of the dominance for which you asked. You will be focused on pleasing me and only me with no regard for your own interests." Hannibal gripped Will's erection and gave it a few languorous tugs as his velvety voice dripped in Will's ear, tone hushed but domineering.

"If you accomplish that to my satisfaction, I may allow you to come if I wish it but that will be at my discretion. You will have no say in the matter, and no amount of begging will influence me. Do I make myself clear?" Hannibal sped up to a punishing pace, fingers curled around Will's shaft almost uncomfortably tight, before abruptly halting and withdrawing his body completely.

"Yes. I understand," Will said breathlessly, cheeks rosy with a flush that was spreading down his chest in bright red patches.

"Get dressed and sit down. We have much left to discuss." Hannibal calmly sat down and drew a sheaf of papers to him without so much as a cursory glance in Will's direction. It was as though nothing had happened.

Will pulled his pants back on and settled into the chair like someone tiptoeing through a dark house, afraid to wake anyone. It felt appropriate to be meek in his body language right now and while he wasn't totally sure if the game was still on or if they had pressed the pause button for now, he was eager to prove he could behave. Will bit back a smile as he wondered if Hannibal realized that Will controlled the situation just as much as he did, wondered if he knew he had given Will exactly what he wanted.

_____

Will was patient and unassuming as Hannibal went over every detail and possibility, only asking questions when necessary and letting him take the reins for the bulk of it. He didn't care so much about where they ended up for the next few months, fully trusting Hannibal to be much more adept at knowing how to plan within their current constraints.

Will only raised an objection at one suggestion he found to be particularly cringe-worthy.

"God, no. We are not opening a therapy practice together, temporary or otherwise. That is where I draw the dysfunctional line."

"Very well. It was only a suggestion. As you are now aware, I have amassed a great many credentials for you so you may select what you feel suits you best. However, you might not need to take advantage of them for a while. While I generally favor taking the avenue of hiding in plain sight, being mysterious and understated in our presence may afford us a greater disguise in this particular country. Although it is a nation of immigrants, you will not find American expatriates or native English speakers in any great numbers. We may stick out more by making our presence regularly known in social arenas. Also, I don't anticipate us being there for too terribly long." Hannibal tilted his head and made an amused noise. "I do miss being a therapist. I should like to return to it someday soon."

"You mean you miss the copious opportunities for exploiting the weaknesses and homicidal urges you unearth from your patients. An endless supply of distressed cattle for you to lead through that long con manipulation only you can do quite so well. It's a game that never has an end and never gets boring because it's ever evolving. Each patient has their own unique set of neuroses and past traumas. Their psychological landscape is never the same so neither are the rules and steps to the game. Never loses its flare for the dramatic." Will took a gulp of the coffee Hannibal had presented him with halfway through their planning session.

"Now who is psychoanalyzing who? Are you sure you wouldn't like to try your hand at it? I am confident you would be an exceptionally talented therapist give your innate empathic abilities, and your biting little speech suggests that perhaps the option is more provocative to you than you realize." Hannibal flashed him a self-righteous look that made Will want to hurl his mug at Hannibal's head.

"Having a thorough understanding of something is not the same thing as an endorsement otherwise I would have been endorsing quite the bevy of indefensible behaviors when I worked for Jack." Will snorted and took another sip of coffee.

"But you did sanction some of them even if you would not permit yourself any awareness of that at the time, and just think," Hannibal grinned, sly and complacent, "where would you be now if it were not for my need to manipulate my patients into discovering their true potential?"

“Oh yes, you are one hundred percent responsible, Hannibal. I am eternally indebted. Thanks for shoving a colossal tube down my throat while I was unconscious and shooting an ear down it, by the way. That was definitely necessary. You couldn’t have just…you know… maybe asked a guy out on a date instead?” Will shrugged and raised his eyebrows.

“Oh, you think you would have been more susceptible to embracing your murderous impulses after a night at the opera and a stomach full of vintage wine?” Hannibal parried back, his micro expressions reading somewhere between delight and admonishment.

“That and a good blowjob maybe. Who knows? The wonders of the post orgasm decision making haze have been known to get people to agree to all kinds of abhorrent things.” Will smirked and leaned back, lacing his fingers together across his stomach.

“Pity. You were being such a good boy up until now. I would hate to have to rescind my offer of compensating you for good behavior based on this smart-mouthed display.” Hannibal swept his eyes over Will’s body like he was assessing the worth of an object.

“I’m sorry. I will gladly make it up to you however I can if you let me. *Please*.” He kept his tone docile and full of penance. Will loved it when they playfully ribbed each other. Their back and forth banter had always been one of his favorite things about their relationship during all of its many stages, but he knew he wasn’t supposed to be doing that right now. Will slid off his chair and came to kneel on the floor between Hannibal’s legs.

“Sit.” Hannibal patted his thighs, and Will rose from the floor to sit sideways across his lap, legs draped over Hannibal’s to hang off the left side.

Will was surprised that Hannibal had suggested such an intimate position. He expected something more aloof right now, something with more distance between the two of them both figuratively and literally. Hannibal traced Will’s bottom lip with his thumb and paused in consideration for a moment.

“Open your mouth,” Hannibal said evenly.

Will parted his lips, his mouth agape but not fully open. It felt weird to be opening it without a purpose. He imagined he looked ridiculous.

“I believe you can obey instructions much better than that. Wider.”

Will opened his mouth more and closed his eyes to cut down on the embarrassment. He felt two of Hannibal’s fingers slide across his tongue and instinctively closed his lips around them and began to suck. He was given a quick slap across the tops of his thighs for his trouble. Will jerked back a bit on Hannibal’s lap but composed himself quickly. He found that he liked how it smarted, how he could feel the imprint of Hannibal’s hand slowly dissipating on his legs.

“I did not tell you to do that. I can see you are going to make this as difficult for me as possible, aren’t you? It gives you a thrill to always be fighting me, doesn’t it?”

Will opened his eyes and shook his head.

“No, perhaps not in the same sense as before as we are now on the same side, but do you like that friction. Crave it in fact. Which is why you asked me for it in a safe, controlled, temporary situation like this.”

Will fought a sigh of rebellion. He wanted so badly to protest Hannibal’s need to psychoanalyze the situation. *Maybe I just want you to fuck my mouth because it’s hot. Jesus fucking Christ. Does everything have to be a lesson in hidden meanings and psychiatric bullshit with you?*

“You are doing it right now in your head. You are curbing the urge, preventing it from bubbling up and forming into impertinent remarks so as to remain obedient, but you want desperately to tell me to shut up right now, don’t you?” Hannibal tilted his head and pressed his fingers down on Will’s tongue.

Will took a deep breath and bid his facial expression to relax into a cool stillness that wouldn’t betray anything other than submission.

“You really are such a good boy when you want to be.” Hannibal purred as he began to move his fingers in and out of Will’s mouth.

Hannibal watched him intently as his fingers crept farther back, eventually nudging at the back of Will’s throat. Will involuntarily gagged a little when Hannibal plunged them back quickly without warning.

“It’s going to be much more than that soon, dear boy. Are you sure you are up to the task?”

Will nodded slowly and let out a little moan as he pictured Hannibal holding him by the hair and filling his mouth completely with his cock.

“One cannot help but wonder why you want it so badly. It seems like a dangerous, ill-advised position to put oneself in with someone like me, does it not? But perhaps that’s what you like about it?” Hannibal’s voice and eyes hardened, and instead of fear, Will only felt his own cock twitch and his heart beating faster as the smallest whimper escaped his throat. Hannibal thrust his fingers into Will’s mouth a few more times, and Will tilted his head back, relaxing his throat and taking it more easily this time. Hannibal withdrew his fingers. “Get on your knees.”

Rising from Hannibal’s lap, Will returned to the floor to kneel between his legs once again. He kept his arms hanging loosely at his sides, careful not to reach out and touch Hannibal even though he wanted to so very much. Hannibal scooted to the edge of his chair and undid his pants, lifting up for a brief moment to pull them down around his knees along with his dark red, silk boxers. His hard cock bobbed away from his body as it was set free. Will wanted to clamp his lips around it so badly, but he remained in place on the floor, awaiting instructions. Hannibal gripped his erection at the base and started leisurely stroking himself.

“Perhaps I should deny you the satisfaction and only permit you to watch,” He said with a low groan as his hand slid over the head of his cock.

“*Please*.” Will tried and failed not to sound pathetically needy.

“Please what, Will?” Hannibal pumped his hand faster, but his expression remained imbued with that collected, steely resolve.

“Please use my mouth, Doctor Lecter. *Please*. I promise I’ll be good.” Will uttered the last few words in a breathy whisper as his cheeks began to burn with that now familiar embarrassment tinged arousal.

“Come closer.” Hannibal widened his knees and urged Will forward with a possessive hand on the back of his neck. “Clasp your hands behind your back. You are forbidden from touching me unless I ask for it. Understood?”

Will nodded and brought both arms behind his back, clasping his left wrist in his right hand. He slid closer, his knees aching a little from the hardwood floor, until he was close enough that he had to move his head to the side to avoid colliding with Hannibal’s hard length until directed to do so.

“Good boy.” Hannibal smoothed Will’s hair back, fingers gripping hard when he reached the nape of his neck, twisting in his hair to direct Will’s head where he wanted it. “Lick along the underside. Broad, flat strokes of your tongue. Take your time.”

Will obeyed, licking slow, reverent laps along Hannibal’s shaft, wetting him so eagerly like he was something delicious, something to be treasured.

“Perfect.” Hannibal whispered, hand loosening in Will’s hair, fingers reaching down to rub along the back of his neck. “Now take just the head in your mouth. Nothing more.” Hannibal waited for Will to comply before giving any further direction. “Suck on it gently.”

Will hollowed his cheeks and sucked on the head of Hannibal’s cock, tongue drawing circles around the tender flesh. His hands twitched behind his back with the aching need to touch Hannibal’s cock, his thighs, anything. Will tightened his fingers around his left wrist in an effort to prevent his hands from surging forward.

“You’re being such a very good boy, Will. You’re doing so well. You look so exquisite right now, face flushed, eyes closed in bliss, so eager to please, so patiently awaiting orders. I know how hard it is for you to resist touching me right now. Can you suppress the urge a little longer?”

Will nodded and moaned around Hannibal’s cock.

“Good. Now take a little more of me into your mouth. Slide your mouth back and forth, but keep your pace measured. Do not rush this. I want to watch you enjoy it.”

Opening his mouth a little wider, Will glided his lips halfway down Hannibal’s swollen erection, moaning at the feeling of heaviness on his tongue that he was coming to love and want so much. Something about it made him want more, made him want to be filled with Hannibal until his mouth threatened to burst at the seams. He wanted to be unraveled and taken apart. He slid his mouth up and down Hannibal’s cock, slicking him with saliva and keeping to the relaxed pace Hannibal had ordered. Will was in total agreement with that directive. It felt so good to take the time to memorize the sensation of every inch of

Hannibal's dick in his mouth, tonguing every vein and ridge so slowly. His own erection was straining painfully against his pants now, and he knew it would only get worse when Hannibal finally gave him what he wanted and thrust mercilessly into his mouth.

"Stop."

Will halted his movements but didn't pull away, aware that someone as semantically precise as Hannibal would have been more specific if that's what he had wanted. Hannibal didn't move or speak for a minute. Will knew Hannibal was testing him to see just how far his patience extended. Finally satisfied, Hannibal leaned forward, balanced on the very edge of the chair now.

"Do not move. Keep your hands anchored behind your back." At last, Hannibal began to thrust into Will's mouth, shallow and torturously slow. It still felt amazing to have Hannibal's cock pushing his lips apart and slipping over his tongue without Will being able to control it in any way, but he hungered for more. Afraid he would forcefully grab Hannibal's ass and yank him forward to get what he wanted, Will squeezed his own wrist tight enough to bruise, nearly crying out from the pain.

Hannibal withdrew from Will's mouth and stood up from the chair, his pants pooling around his ankles. Will looked up at him with a puzzled expression. The sun was almost completely absent from the sky now, and the room was darkening rapidly, a small glow creeping in from the bottom of the only window and casting an eerie shadow image of the window panes on the floor. The split between night and day made the angles of Hannibal's face sharper and almost otherworldly. He looked fearsome, a striking creature bathed half in rising moonlight and half in setting sun, on the cusp of distinctions and entirely of his own brutal making. No force of divinity or nature could lay claim to him.

"Open your mouth, Will. You may release your hands and feel free to touch me now. Pinch my inner thigh if this should become too much for you to take at any point. Do it hard enough for me to notice immediately. I need to be able to clearly recognize the signal for what it is."

Will's mouth fell open immediately, the earlier awkwardness eradicated as he stared up at Hannibal. Releasing his iron grip on his left wrist, he brought his arms to rest at his sides but did not try to touch Hannibal just yet.

Taking a fistful of Will's hair, Hannibal filled his mouth with one hard, sudden thrust. Will exhaled sharply through his nose and inhaled as much as possible in anticipation of not having another chance. Hannibal stilled for a few seconds and then plunged in again, moving in and out with abandon now, the head of his cock hitting Will's throat with every thrust.

Will felt his eyes begin to water, moisture leaking out of the corners in steady streams and still he wanted more, his hands coming up to clamp on either side of Hannibal's ass, urging him to return again and again. He opened his eyes (Will hadn't even noticed that he'd closed them) and his vision was blurring, flecked with stars like he had been staring at the sun too long. He fleetingly thought that Hannibal just as well could be the sun anyway for how much he ruled and consumed every aspect of Will's life, the celestial body that the rhythm of everything in the world rose and set to as far as Will was concerned.

Hannibal pulled back brusquely, and Will gasped for air, nails raking down the curves of Hannibal's ass as he tipped his head back to beg for more. Hannibal ran a gentle hand down the side of Will's face before thrusting in again, Will now tremendously aware of the pornographic wet, choking sounds coming from his throat with every implacable thrust Hannibal made into his mouth.

Pulling back once more to give Will a moment to catch his breath, Hannibal tightened his hand in Will's hair and returned to ravage his mouth with a few more harsh thrusts before resting his hard length at the back of Will's mouth, filling him so completely as he held Will's head in place. Will was flush against him, his nose brushing against the downy hair above Hannibal's cock as Hannibal came in thick spurts down Will's throat, groaning Will's name with such fervor that Will's own erection felt like it somehow grew even harder. He knew if Hannibal touched him right now, he would come in seconds.

Swallowing every last drop of Hannibal's release, Will slid his lips down Hannibal's softening cock until it was gone completely, the sudden emptiness of his mouth feeling odd and a little lonely. He looked up at Hannibal with eyes moist from emotion and having his mouth fucked so beautifully and brutally. Somehow even though he knew he could get off the floor now, he didn't want to until Hannibal indicated his approval.

Hannibal reached out both hands and Will accepted the help, rising shakily to his feet, the ache of kneeling on a hard, unforgiving wooden floor finally catching up to him. Hannibal practically carried him like a ragdoll to his chest, settling Will onto his lap as he sat them both down in the desk chair. He petted Will's hair with soft strokes and covered his face with loving kisses.

"My darling Will…you were so incredible tonight. So good for me beyond my wildest imaginings." He whispered in Will's ear, soothing hands running up and down his arms and back. "Would you like to come now?"

Will bit his lip and nuzzled against Hannibal's shoulder. He chose his words carefully.

"Only if that's what you want." Will lifted his chin to look at Hannibal and was surprised to see how stunned he looked. He looked like Will's worship and desire to please him in every way would just about break Hannibal before all was said and done.

"I do. Very much." Hannibal's voice was hushed and full of awe as he tucked errant strands of hair behind Will's ear, looking at him like he was the only thing he ever wanted to see.

"Just to warn you, it's probably going to be shorter than a fifteen-year-old boy's first time. I'm so hard, I'm mildly afraid it's going to fall off as soon as you touch it." Will was breathless and not sure if his body would withstand anything more tonight, but he still craved Hannibal's touch.

"I was going to ask for your verdict on the events of tonight, but I will take that sentiment as a most emphatic approbation." Hannibal chuckled and lifted Will off his lap before standing up and gesturing for Will to sit down again. Will gave him a befuddled look but sat down nevertheless. He was still too wobbly on his feet to protest the idea of being inert in a comfortable chair for a while.

To his surprise, Hannibal sank to his knees and made quick work of the button and zipper on Will's pants, pulling them down a bit and reaching into his underwear to free his impossibly erect cock. He glanced up at Will to make sure everything was ok before descending on his shaft with a warm, slippery mouth that made Will instantly throw his head back and moan. Hannibal licked and sucked Will like he was something rare and delectable, and Will lamented that he wouldn't last long enough to draw it out properly. Tangling a hand in Hannibal's hair, Will came after only a couple minutes, the shudders of orgasm ripping through his body with a force that almost hurt it was so intense.

"Fuck...Hannibal…I…" Will realized his hand was clamped onto Hannibal's shoulder so hard it had to be hurting him. He let go and slumped into the chair, his limbs feeling like they were made of some dense liquid he had no idea how to manipulate into moving. "Why isn't there a bed in here? There should be a bed in here right now. Fuck…I feel so…so…" *Full and complete. I wish you could fill me up from the inside out every waking minute.*

"It has been well established that I am capable of carrying you quite easily. Would you like me to take you to bed?"

"Mmm-hmm," Will mumbled sleepily.

Hannibal chuckled before scooping Will up into his arms, supporting his head on his right arm and slinging Will's legs over his left arm.

"You are absolutely adorable; do you know that?"

"People call kittens and puppies adorable. I'm a force to be reckoned with, dammit." Will playfully swiped at the hand around his thigh before burying his face in Hannibal's chest with a curmudgeony groan.

"He grumbles and burrows like a small, lethargic, juvenile animal, thereby intensifying the legitimacy of that which he sought to protest against." Hannibal smiled as he carried Will up the stairs. "Besides, with your unshorn, unruly mop of curls and me carrying you like this, the puppy comparison is hardly arguable."

Will only grumbled again in response.

"You know, if I had been aware of the somnolent effect orgasms seem to have on you, I might have prescribed some more unorthodox methods of therapy during your nightmare-riddled days."

"You hardly could have prescribed anything *more* unorthodox than you were already putting into practice, Doctor." Will opened one eye to give him a cock-eyed glare.

"Why the abundance of sassy rejoinders today?" Hannibal carefully laid Will down on the bed.

"Did you just say 'sassy'?" Will laughed.

"Yes, what do you find so amusing about that?" Hannibal perched on the edge of the bed.

“I don’t know. It just seems a little colloquial for you, I guess.” Will reached for Hannibal’s hand and tried to pull him closer. “Why aren’t you getting in bed with me?”

“I’m afraid it is all of eight o’clock, Will. I regret to inform you that all future retorts regarding my age will be met with a reminder of this incident.” Hannibal smiled and caressed the side of Will’s face.

“It’s not just the orgasms, you know. I’ve never slept as well as I do with you.” This truth hadn’t even registered to Will until he vocalized it, but oh how true it was. With the exception of the first night in the cabin, he had been free of nightmares and restless sleep since they arrived. Having long since passed the point of caring about something like the fact that curling up with a cannibalistic serial killer delivered the most peaceful sleep he had experienced thus far in life, Will just smiled and squeezed Hannibal’s hand.

“I’ve noticed. I am glad to see you no longer struggling to obtain some restful slumber. Would you like me to stay with you until you fall asleep?”

“No, it’s ok. I shouldn’t sleep long anyway or else I’ll be up at three in the morning. Just set an alarm for me for a couple hours from now, and I’ll come join you later?”

“Of course.” Hannibal kissed Will’s knuckles, set the clock on the nightstand for ten, and ambled downstairs.

After Will had risen from his impromptu evening nap, they spent a lovely couple of hours relaxing by the fire with wine, Hannibal making a late night snack of bruschetta and olive tapenade. Will teased him about how elaborate even his improvised snacks were, earning him a put-upon sigh from Hannibal.

“Neither of these appetizers requires the level of skill that could cause one to refer to them as elaborate dishes. Most of the ingredients for olive tapenade, for example, can be found in cans in any household pantry, Will. Why other people choose to ignore this fact in favor of glomming onto atrocious, processed, pre-packaged snack foods to satisfy hunger in a pinch is beyond me. Even the most abysmally untalented of culinary simpletons among us could recreate something like this if they simply invested in a food processor and *tried*.”

Will’s eyes rolled so far back in his head that he wondered if they would remain stuck in that position forever.

“Ok, I’ll be sure to tell that to the next struggling single mother of four I see who works three jobs to make ends meet.”

To his surprise, Hannibal simply shrugged and said “fair enough” as he wiped his hands on his apron. After removing the apron, he divided the food between two plates and handed one

to Will. He signaled with an elbow for Will to follow him into the living room.

“You’re going to let me eat this on the couch?!”

“If you are still harboring any doubts about how much I love you, I think this should settle the matter.” Hannibal smiled as he set his plate on the coffee table and sat down in the middle of the couch with his glass of wine.

Will placed his plate on the table as well and settled in the left corner of the couch, wine in hand. He retrieved the plush brown blanket from the back of the couch and threw it over his bare legs. Somewhere in the middle of his nap, he had taken his pants and button down off and thrown on one of Hannibal’s sweaters, a very soft, red cashmere one that was surprisingly comfortable. It was a bit too large and boxy, the sleeves hanging halfway down his hands unless he pushed them up. Will was aware that he looked demure and vulnerable in just his boxers and an oversized sweater, mostly because Hannibal kept looking at him like he wanted to go for round two.

“Quit undressing me with your eyes, Doctor Lecter.” Will poked Hannibal’s thigh with a blanketed foot.

Hannibal smiled and turned his gaze to the fire.

“Wow, you’re not even going to deny it. Look how far we’ve come.”

“What does it take to silence you for a while?” Hannibal turned back to Will and took a dignified sip of wine.

“You know.” Will waggled his eyebrows.

“You are not particularly silent during those times either nor would I ever wish for you to be.” Hannibal squeezed Will’s thigh.

“Are you…nervous about what comes next? Worried? Do you *get* nervous?”

“Of course. Do not mistake a lack of outward expression for an internal absence of stressors. I simply know how to maintain and do not see any value in allowing anxiety to make my choices for me.”

“Not everyone has that much authority in how they respond to stressful situations.”

“Well, as we know, I am not like other people. Neither are you.”

“No, we certainly aren’t.” Will watched the flames licking over the logs, great destructive red and orange tongues consuming everything in their path. “We should do something celebratory tomorrow. We have so little time left here. I’m going to miss it. We should give it a proper sendoff.”

“I agree. And we will.” Hannibal rubbed Will’s legs through the blanket and smirked knowingly.

“I don’t like that smirk one bit, Hannibal. What are you planning?”

“It will be met with your full approval. I promise.” Hannibal took a sip of wine, looking cocky and completely unbothered.

“Hannibal…Your ‘surprises’ tend to be…How do I put this delicately? Emotionally scarring in the most permanent of ways.” Will took a gulp of wine as if to ward off the lasting effects of whatever unpleasant reveal he was about to be confronted with. “Come on. Just tell me.”

“I will remain steadfast in my secrecy until tomorrow.” Hannibal smiled. He was clearly amusing himself, and it made Will wary.

“Fine. I suppose you can’t wreak that much havoc tucked away in the wilderness here anyway.” Will took another drink from his glass and snuggled into the corner of the couch.

Hannibal raised his eyebrows.

“No…do NOT take that statement as a challenge, Hannibal.”

“You worry too much, Will.” Hannibal continued smiling in a way that suggested he was internally laughing at an inside joke. Will remained a little annoyed at the fact that the joke seemed to be at his expense.

The next morning, Will woke earlier than usual, his brain alight with too many thoughts to stay asleep. The usual crushing anxieties, endless loops of past mistakes, and future worst case scenarios weren’t the culprits this time. There were no haunting after-images of past killers whose minds he had inhabited under Jack’s request. It was pure excitement and adrenaline, pins and needles pleasantly tingling his skin. They would be leaving in only a day or two, and the thought of finally embarking on the journey to a new life away from everyone, away from all the mistakes and miscommunications of the past, was more comforting than Will thought it would be. There was no more underlying sense of terror and uncertainty. If things didn’t go according to plan, if they got caught, if they died, it didn’t matter anymore. This was what Will was destined for; he felt sure of that now more than ever. There was no going back, no choosing another path. This was what he wanted and needed regardless of the possible consequences.

He glanced at the clock. Noting the time (7:00 AM), he debated trying to force his body to get another hour of rest in, but relented and got up after a few minutes. Hannibal wasn’t in bed anyway so there was even less of a point to lingering upstairs.

As he descended the stairs, his eyes roved over the details of the house, trying to construct a blueprint of the bones of the place to hold in a corner of his mind forever. The high ceilings, the smooth pine, the large Eastern facing windows that bathed the living room and kitchen in ample beams of light to give the place that homely, peaceful feeling, the irregular pattern of the cream and beige colored stones the fireplace was comprised of, the cool temperature of the metal railing of the stairs as he trailed his fingers along it. He would miss every inch of it.

Taking a left at the bottom of the stairs, Will made his way into the open area of the kitchen and immediately halted. Hannibal was stooping down to pet a furry head mottled with various shades of brown, murmuring instructions and rewarding obedience with bits of sausage. As soon as Hannibal turned his head to acknowledge Will's presence, the fluffy canine abandoned all pretense of obeying his orders to remain still and bounded over to meet Will. Will bent down to greet Winston, hugging the dog to his chest like his life depended on it.

"Hey, boy! It's so good to see you! I've missed you so much, Winston."

Will vigorously rubbed behind Winston's ears, and the animal responded with a little yip of excitement, big, pink tongue coming out to lick the side of Will's face.

"He seems very happy to be reunited with his master. He is exceptionally well-trained. I managed to keep him from hurtling up the stairs to find you, but I am sure that would not have lasted much longer. He astutely knew where to look for you and was clearly very anxious to return to you once again."

"I take back everything I said about your surprises. Hannibal…thank you so much. How did you do this?" Will was positively beaming.

"Chiyoh."

"Well, give her my gratitude."

"I will. My apologies for interrupting this tender reunion, but your surprise is twofold. I thought it would be appropriate to pair a gift of innocence with an offering that is perhaps on the more…pernicious side as that is the dichotomous theme which has ruled over the entirety of our relationship, wouldn't you agree?"

"I would." Will gave Winston's head a lingering pat before standing up. Winston rubbed against Will's legs, winding his body between them, fuzzy tail wagging incessantly. "What do you have for me, Hannibal?"

Hannibal placed a hand on Will's arm and steered him toward the other end of the cabin. As they walked past the stairs, Will saw the edge of a lengthy dining room table in the empty area in front of the door to the study. It was dressed in a crisp white tablecloth, and Will could see a gilt-edged China place setting on the end. Will made his way behind the stairs, and the rest of the table came into view. There were two more place settings, and seated in front of one of them, at the other end of the table, was a woman clad in a low cut, lacy, navy blue dress, her loose blonde curls framing her drug addled blue eyes.

"Hello, Bedelia." Will's tone immediately shifted to something low and foreboding. His shoulders squared, his posture straightened to lengthen his spine. He regretted that he wasn't wearing a suit jacket so he could button it to mirror his delivery of warning the last time he saw her. *Meat is back on the menu.* "You're looking a little ashen. Are you feeling okay?"

Bedelia's hazy eyes fluttered as she strained to look in Will's direction, her chest rising and falling irregularly as she fought the effects of the drugs in her system.

Hannibal came to stand next to him, and they exchanged conspiratorial grins. Will reached for his hand and twined their fingers together.

“Have I mentioned that I take back everything I said about your surprises?”

Hannibal cradled Will’s face with his free hand and pulled him in for a kiss.

“Bon voyage, dear Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Alright lovelies, the next chapter after this will be it for the safehouse days! I plan to split off into a part two after they leave because I just have too many things I would like to do with them to stop now. However, I'm not totally confident in my abilities to do well with writing them in a new environment. I HOPE I can do it well and keep the chapters coming at the pace they have been, but I guess we'll just have to see.

Sorry if this chapter seemed too long, but I really, really wanted to end it with the Bedelia cliffhanger. I already started chapter 9, and I'm doing some different things with it that seem to be paying off so far so hopefully it continues down that road.

Btw, feel free to send me tumblr prompts if you have an idea you'd like to see. I'm not averse to doing some one shots and whatnot in-between chapters! As always, much gratitude to all of you for reading and commenting and please let me know what you think of this one!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this took longer than usual, but I wanted to make sure it was right since it's the last one and all that. :) Mild description of surgery here, but nothing gruesome as compared to the content from the show. It was kind of emotional to wrap this all up! Will expound on more of that and give a proper extra thanks to you all on the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun had not yet risen. The sky was that stark, blue-black only seen in the predawn hours. It was a time of day Hannibal was intimately acquainted with since it provided the perfect, quiet cover for him to carry out his crimes and construct the adroitly crafted symbolism of his canvases. The stillness of the wee hours of the morning had a tranquility about them that kept his focus sharp and his mind clear. No distractions in the form of unwanted social interaction with the peons he was normally surrounded by, no need to maintain any carefully constructed illusions about who he was, just him and his work, his *art*. He was never more true to himself than he was when he would step back to admire his handiwork in the moments after completing a piece. Despite being veiled with metaphor and symbolism, those works of art were the most honest communication from Hannibal. He was speaking directly from the heart when he made them. He thought that being able to cull those inspirations from the depths of his mind and shape them into something beautiful and exact, satisfying in the same way a wordsmith feels complete when he articulates so clearly and succinctly in prose that which fails him in speech, was enough. Believing that to be the height of his capacity for joy, he did not wish for more.

But then he met Will Graham. Hearing Will delineate the nature of his empathic response during their sessions and seeing how truly deep his understanding went, Hannibal began to imagine a different, higher level of experience for himself. He began to imagine the possibility of a true partner, someone he not only didn't have to don the person suit for but who could also stand with him in those quiet predawn moments and look back at his canvas with a shared awe and comprehension. Someone who could *see* him without needing any explanation.

As their relationship developed, he began to see potential in Will for creations of his own and began to imagine what a merging of their dark muses would look like. Hannibal began to imagine a whole life with Will in ways he had never permitted himself to hope for with anyone, and he found that he had a surprisingly limited amount of reservations about allowing the compromises he would need to make to share his life. If that shared life was with Will, it was worth every risk and sacrifice. What did terrify him was how cavernous the need became. He reached a point where he no longer knew how far he was willing to go to obtain Will's love, to make him see what Hannibal saw when he looked at him, to make Will accept the impulses he sought to tamp down. After he surrendered to Jack, Hannibal knew

there was no limit. After that, it was foolish to pretend that Will didn't exert as much control over him as he had over Will. Will would be his undoing, and finally knowing that almost made being locked away behind the glass seem like it had been a wise decision. Maybe he could rid himself of this ache, this obsession, once and for all. Maybe the connection and memory would fade like sand slipping through his fingers to be washed away with the tide.

Except it didn't. If anything, the dull ache turned into a pulsing throb since he had little else to occupy his mind, and when Will finally stepped through those doors for the first time, the air felt electrically charged. Hannibal could nearly see the crackle and hiss of it like a live wire cut loose in a violent rainstorm. It was simultaneously elating and disheartening to know that what was between them was still so palpable after all these years. He was glad that he still affected Will that much, but he also felt the sharp pang of knowing that Will was still fighting it. Reciprocation seemed light years away, and Hannibal didn't put much stock in the old "tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" adage when it came to Will. To have that passion ignited after he had begun to resign himself to the probable outcome of never seeing Will again was painful to say the least. But little by little, he saw glimmers in Will that suggested he was losing the battle of rejecting his primal instincts and, in turn, losing the battle of rejecting Hannibal. Although they still cut to the quick, Hannibal could see Will's biting comments for what they really were: armor, a defensive strategy to distance and protect himself as much as he could. They weren't his true feelings but rather a mask he was trying on to see if he could mold it to fit over his skin well enough that it might one day fuse with his true face and replace it entirely.

While Hannibal could never have predicted the events of the night they plummeted into the water, he knew that something had changed when Will came to him and requested his cooperation with the escape ploy. His eyes were fiery with determination. He no longer looked like a man fighting with himself, and it gave Hannibal hope. As they tumbled into the turbulent waves, bodies woven together in what very well could have been their final embrace, Hannibal felt no regret, only serenity. *No greater love hath man, than to lay down his life for a friend.* He had meant every word of it.

Hannibal ruminated over this as he stood in front of the glass door to the back porch with his mug of coffee, gazing out into the vast, dusky distance. The trees were swaying in the heavy wind, clawing and scraping across the sky above them like something bestial and savage. The lake looked mysterious in its dark depth at this time of day, and while patches of it were illuminated in moonlight, the effect enhanced rather than softened the eerie appearance.

He heard her footsteps before he saw her pale reflection in the glass.

"Hello, Chiyoh."

"Hello, Hannibal."

Hannibal turned around to face her.

"Would you like some coffee?"

"No. I would prefer to keep this brief."

“I understand.”

They watched each other for a moment as if they were enemies in a boxing ring sizing up their opponent before concluding which strike would be the most effective.

“I do not understand your allegiance to this man. He tried to kill you more than once.”

“It is very fortunate then that my life decisions are not mired by a need for your understanding and approval, isn’t it?” Hannibal’s tone was low, controlled, menacing. He turned back to the scenery outside the back door. “And it is worth noting that I have tried to kill him as well…among other things. We are both scarred by each other, stained with indelible marks that align and lock into place when together. Some may insist this is to our detriment, but I would contend that it is the axis on which the meaning of my life revolves. He fills cracks in my façade, repairing parts of myself I did not know were broken, and I, in turn, reflect back to him the truth of who he is in all its uniquely brutal majesty. We are two incomplete halves of a whole who did not know or dare to dream of our complimentary pieces before we found them.”

“You love him,” Chiyoh said simply, no hint of how she felt about this revelation to be found in her flat inflection.

“Yes, I do.” Hannibal turned back to her, and they regarded each other in silence for a moment, moonlight dancing across their faces in ghostly patterns.

“Strange to think of a man like you governed by such a trite concept.”

Hannibal made an amused huff.

“I beg to differ. There is nothing trite about that which has inspired the great minds of both our time and the eras before us, artists and men of rational thought alike, to create many of the most precious gifts of discovery and beauty that this world has been granted.”

“A man like you has no capacity for such pure emotion. You are a creature not so easily defined.”

“He said something very similar to me, and I believed it to be true at one time as well. We have both since been proven wrong.”

Chiyoh stared back at him, cold and unwavering, and then something softened marginally in her gaze as she seemed to locate some cue within Hannibal’s own eyes that made her reconsider.

“That may be the case. Or you both could be victims of each other’s shrouds, mutually and willingly blind. I suppose that will be up to the two of you to decide.”

Chiyoh wordlessly walked to the front door, and Hannibal followed, maneuvering an unconscious Bedelia from the backseat of Chiyoh’s sleek, black car onto the living room couch. Winston trotted after them, surprising Hannibal with how trusting and calm he was. Hannibal wondered if Winston recognized him from the distant past.

Hannibal followed Chiyoh back to her car, and they regarded each other as if unsure how to give an appropriate goodbye. Chiyoh eventually just nodded tersely and moved to open the driver's side door.

"Chiyoh."

Chiyoh turned her head halfway, enough to hear better but not enough to look at him.

"When I turned myself in, you were free. Atonement had been made. Why are you still watching over me?"

"In some way, you are family and always will be."

"It appears I am not the only one beholden to concepts you deem pedestrian."

Chiyoh looked at Hannibal with a reserved half smile before getting into her car and driving away.

"She will be unconscious in a minute or two. Forgive me for ushering you into action right away. I could have brought her to the basement, but I wanted a reveal with a bit more elegance before we prepped her for dinner." Hannibal quickly walked behind Bedelia and gently braced her neck with one strong hand before it collapsed backward, hanging limply. He picked her up from the chair with practiced ease, carrying her bridal style just like he had done with Will under very different circumstances only yesterday.

"I appreciate it." The image of Bedelia lying comatose on a cold slab in the basement wasn't as evocative as this. Will smiled, a twisted, spectral thing spreading across his lips as he pictured Hannibal setting this table while he slept.

"Would you open the door to the study for me, please?"

Will walked over and opened it, stepping aside as he awaited Hannibal's instructions.

"Now lift the rug in front of the desk."

Underneath the rug was a large square shaped section in the floor with a metal latch that sat neatly in a small depression carved in the wood. Without waiting for a prompt, Will curled a forefinger under the metal ring and pulled until the hidden door popped open, balancing at an angle on its hinges to reveal a small built-in wooden ladder. Will stepped aside again and gestured for Hannibal to go ahead.

Shifting Bedelia so that she was hanging over his right shoulder, Hannibal descended the ladder. The effortlessness with which he did this while carrying an unconscious person called to mind all the experience he had with this. *Carrying another human must be second nature to him by now, as common as carrying unwieldy armfuls of groceries would be to anyone else.* Will snickered a little at the thought as he followed Hannibal into the basement, noticing that overhead lights turned on automatically as Hannibal entered the room.

The floor was finished with a shiny epoxy coating with a swirled pattern of various shades of dark green underneath. It was no doubt chosen to aid in easy cleanup. Overall the space was about as clinical as Will had anticipated, but there was a strange, incongruent warmth to it. Stainless steel was prominent (cabinets, tools, fridge, medical examining table), and there was a row of cabinets against one wall covered in a marble countertop matching the green hues of the floor. Above that were overhead cabinets that housed recessed lighted, the area awash in a soft, golden glow when Hannibal turned them on. With the metal sink in the middle of the countertop, that portion of the room resembled a kitchen, recalling fond memories of watching Hannibal in his element. The more he thought about it, Will supposed that there wasn't anything inherently more innocent about a kitchen considering all the gruesome sources for the dishes Hannibal had prepared for his guests over the years. A kill and dissection room may as well have been synonymous with food preparation where Hannibal was concerned. This was just a more honest presentation of it, a look at the man behind the curtain.

"You do not have to assist in this stage. If you prefer to abstain, that is quite alright." Hannibal looked at him as Will's eyes roamed the basement, gauging his comfort level.

"I want to. It was my dream, and you made it happen. The least I could do is help," Will said sincerely, looking squarely at Hannibal.

Hannibal looked relieved, his facial muscles relaxing ever so slightly. He walked over to the set of cabinets and opened one of the overhead ones to pull out two sets of thin, light blue disposable scrubs and two doctor's masks.

"You will need these," Hannibal said as he handed Will one of each. "But before you put them on, I wonder if you might be interested in permitting me to draw some blood for testing? It seems to be the appropriate time to broach the subject again."

"Oh…yeah, of course. You can do that?"

"Yes, Will." Hannibal smiled at his surprise. "It is actually something one can do at home quite easily, and it does not require medical expertise or the acquisition of any hard to obtain equipment. That being said, I do have more resources than any home test you might buy and can therefore provide you with a more refined result. Sit here." Hannibal motioned to a chair resting in the spot directly to the right of the marble topped cabinets.

Will laid the scrubs down next to the sink and sat in the chair. After sanitizing the crease where Will's forearm and bicep met, Hannibal tied his arm and felt for a vein while Will made a tight fist. Hannibal worked quickly and painlessly. Will barely felt a prick when the needle went in. After he finished, Hannibal sat down, and Will marveled at how efficiently he drew his own blood.

“I could have done that for you, you know.” Will smiled wryly.

“Sorry. Force of habit.” Hannibal looked up at Will as he wiped the injection site clean with an alcohol wipe and secured a cotton ball on top of it with some medical tape. He placed the vials in a test tube rack on the counter to be dealt with later.

Will picked the scrubs up from the counter and stepped into them, pulling them on over his boxers and t-shirt (something Hannibal surprisingly did own although they were designer and made from such absurdly soft combed cotton that Will felt like a mangy imposter in them) and slipping the mask over his mouth and nose as Hannibal did the same. Hannibal indicated for Will to follow him as he ventured over to the sink to wash his hands, drying them with a white towel he plucked from a neatly folded stack resting next to the sink and snapping on a pair of latex gloves from a box on the countertop. Will repeated this set of actions, trying to ground himself through the comfort of following a routine. While he meant what he had said to Hannibal, he was still shaky from nerves. This was a completely new experience and signified another rung on the ladder of climbing into Hannibal’s world to mesh it with his own.

A glaring overhead lamp was already craned over the operating table on which Hannibal had placed Bedelia’s sleeping body. A metal table of surgical instruments was already orderly arranged as well, the sharp implements gleaming with sterile efficiency in the bright light. Will realized Hannibal must have prepped everything beforehand.

In the end, Will did not have to do much in the way of fulfilling nurse duties beyond handing Hannibal instruments and controlling the bleeding, which was surprisingly limited. It was a swift procedure that Hannibal performed with nimble, proficient fingers, sterilizing the area first before dotting the section where the incision would take place with a black magic marker. A simple scalpel was used to sever the skin, and he left the flap of skin on the bottom of her leg intact. Next, Hannibal sliced through the muscles with a different, sharper surgical knife Will did not have a name for before separating the femur with an electric bone saw. The sound was rather chilling and vibrated Will to the core with a harsh reminder of what was happening. It’s difficult to affect an air of detachment when the piercing shriek of a saw slicing through human bone is assaulting your ear drums. However, it wasn’t the personal nature that bothered him even though there was a voice in the back of his head that gently reminded him of the last time he had heard this sound. Will felt no remorse for what they were taking from Bedelia and no disgust for the grisly nature of how it was being done. Instead, it was something more adjacent to veneration, a respect for human life and a sense that what they were doing here today was *important*. He wondered if that was how Hannibal felt upon the completion of his tableaus, a notion of having been an agent of something significant in the grand scheme of the universe. It was a powerful, heady sensation, and it made Will understand why Hannibal spoke of God so often.

Hannibal folded the flap of skin over and stitched Bedelia back together, Will taking note of how relatively clean the shiny surface of the operating table was, all things considered. Hannibal had not even removed her clothes. He had only gingerly taken the delicate material of her dress between his fingers and hiked it up before folding it neatly over her mid-section, wrapping her in a sterile, white cloth below the waist to about mid-thigh.

After shedding their scrubs and depositing them in the trash, Hannibal and Will exchanged a poignant glance. It was clear to Will that Hannibal was pleased with what he saw reflected back at him in Will's eyes. They had taken another step into the unmapped landscape of their new lives, and it had gone without so much as the tiniest misstep or second thoughts from Will. Hannibal drew Will close and hugged him tightly, fingers tangling in his lover's hair as he kissed his temple.

"What was that for?" Will smiled as Hannibal withdrew from the embrace.

"For giving a man not only everything he has ever wanted but also that of which he did not know he was in desperate need."

"It's a shame I'll be deceased in a short while. The works on your shared pathology and severe codependency that I could craft after spending time in close quarters witnessing the mechanics of your relationship would surely secure me a spot among the ranks of the greats. How the true nature of this sick…rapport seemed to elude Jack Crawford and the rest of his colleagues for so long is beyond me. Whatever acumen the great minds of the FBI are presumed to have should clearly be under question now." Bedelia took a sip of her wine and tilted her eyes toward the ceiling in a display of annoyance.

"You may not reach an untimely end just yet, Bedelia. You are at the mercy of Will. I have no control here. This is his design; I am merely a facilitator." Hannibal shot Will a sly glance as he sliced into the fragrant roast. Hannibal had butterflied the meat and spread a bread stuffing made with caramelized onions, fennel, green apples, and rosemary along the length of it. A layer of prosciutto had gone on top of that before Hannibal rolled up the cut of meat tightly and trussed it together with kitchen twine. He rubbed the top with olive oil and a mixture of salt, pepper, rosemary, and brown sugar before putting it in the oven. It filled the house with a heavenly aroma.

Hannibal placed a slice of roast on each of their plates before dishing out some lemon and garlic roasted Brussel sprouts and parsnip, mushroom, and leek gratin to accompany it. Looking rather pleased with himself, Hannibal folded a cloth napkin across his lap as he sat down. He was wearing one of his three piece suits, a medium blue windowpane checked one that Will had recognized when Hannibal pulled it out of the closet.

"I've missed seeing you in these," Will had said wistfully as he fingered the lapels of the suit. Hannibal had only smiled knowingly before selecting a darker blue one for Will to wear.

Will tilted Hannibal's chin up with his fingers and gave him a long, slow kiss before sitting down himself. This time Bedelia's eyes rolled so far back in her head, it looked like the impact might give her a three day migraine.

"How nice it must be to finally be able to see your reflection without requiring the aid of a mirror, Hannibal. Think of all the time you'll save." Bedelia took a hearty gulp of wine (Hannibal had chosen a full bodied French Viognier with notes of pear and violet that paired very nicely with the meal) as she looked defiantly across the table at Hannibal. Bedelia and Hannibal were seated at opposing heads of the table with Will in-between the two of them.

"My fascination and love for Will is not borne of the same vain impulse that drives the human race to procreate and project their hopes and lost dreams onto their biological children in an attempt to right the wrongs and failures of their past. Do not reduce it to some commonplace narcissistic desire such as that. You know better by now anyhow, perhaps more than anyone save for Will and myself of course." Pinching the stem of the glass carefully between his fine, long fingers, Hannibal took a dignified sip of wine before cutting into the portion of Bedelia that was on his porcelain plate. "You should eat before your dinner grows cold, Bedelia."

Will carved into his slice of meat as well. As he brought it to his lips, he felt no reservation. In fact, he felt like the cat who got the canary. He smiled as he chewed. It was cooked to moist perfection, all the flavors melding perfectly together to create yet another exception dish from Hannibal Lecter's kitchen, and this time it was all for Will.

"It appears you have lost the battle for your soul, Will Graham. Has he finally convinced you that there is nothing left for you in this world but him?" Bedelia eyed her plate with revulsion before turning her cool gaze to Will.

Before Will could respond, Hannibal interjected, "Subtle manipulation was never your forte, and Will is much too resolute and sure of himself these days to be susceptible to it at any rate."

"Seemed to serve your purpose just fine." Bedelia's words were delivered with a remarkable calm, flowing out in an even, unhurried pace but with enough of an icy tint to them to cut like glass.

Hannibal made an amused sound in the back of his throat and took another bite of Bedelia. Will remained silent, enjoying the utter malice between the two of them as they volleyed insults back and forth.

"I only cultivated what was already present. I was informed of how exceptionally critical and rancorous you were toward my Will and our connection to one another in my absence. Whatever could have served as your motivation, Bedelia?" Hannibal tilted his head in that unsettlingly cold way of his before taking another sip of wine. Will reveled in the possessive note to his voice and posture. *My Will*.

"Because she was a poor, second rate substitute, and she knows it. She was gunning to be Bluebeard's last wife, and I rewrote her ending. Jealousy is really very unbecoming on a person who prides themselves on appearances and dignity as much as you do, Dr. Du

Maurier. It's rather prosaic for you, don't you think?" Will hit the syllables of his words like a hammer driving a nail into yielding wood, splitting into it unforgivingly.

Bedelia huffed a muted sound of derision that was neither quite a laugh nor a groan.

"I'm not *envious* of your modern take on Bonnie and Clyde with an erudite twist. I have no desire to be a part of anything approaching that. I have suffered enough at the hands of Hannibal Lecter for a lifetime."

"No, but you do like control and being right. Hannibal wouldn't have been drawn to you if you didn't…wouldn't have sat opposite you for mock sessions for so long. I say mock because no one is ever really Hannibal's psychiatrist as you well know by now. You were always a pawn, but you fancy yourself worth more than that, something more triumphant, a bigger player in the game. You could have refused to see me when I came to you under the pretense of entering treatment again, but you didn't. You preferred to spar weekly and lord over my head your perceived sense of superiority and better grasp of the situation than me."

"You also did not have to seek me out." Bedelia was taking gulps of wine as often as possible now.

"Well…I *am* jealous, Bedelia. I have no trouble admitting that. Not leaving for Europe with Hannibal is my biggest regret. You were living a life which should have been mine. " Will smirked and raised his glass in mock toast to her while Hannibal looked beside himself with arrogance over Will's bitter response.

"Is that all this is? I would hate to think that the formidable, calculating Dr. Hannibal Lecter has stooped to allowing his *pet*," Bedelia spat out the word maliciously as she fixed Hannibal with a glare, "to make homicidal decisions based on something so petty."

"Oh my dear Bedelia, I'm afraid you have had it coming to you for a long time. Trust that your fate was written in the cards regardless. There are many reasons behind your appearance as our guest of honor tonight. And I do not control Will. I do not *allow* him this as it is his for the taking although I do enjoy being able to accommodate him. After all, you have been rather rude to Will. You must answer for that as well." Hannibal and Will exchanged devious smiles before placidly turning back to their meals as though it were any normal household dinner in an average family home.

"So what *do* you plan to do with me, Mr. Graham? If you're going to kill me, I would like to request that we dispense with the formalities and move the timeline ahead. Are you inheriting Hannibal's flair for theatrics? Seems like an unwise choice, being fugitives on the run and all. Fugitives who haven't run very far, I might add. Just where are we exactly?" Bedelia took a tentative bite of the gratin, still carefully avoiding her slice of roast.

"I think," Will paused for a moment, slowly rotating his wine glass on the table between his thumb and middle finger, "you should live, Bedelia. Because above all else, you want to be free of worry about us finding you. You don't want Hannibal Lecter to have any control over you anymore. You would prefer to die here because it would signify the end. If your last exhale were to be at this table, it would be one of relief, of peace. I don't want that for you, and I certainly don't want to be the agent to administer such a reprieve. And you're smart

enough not to search for us, aren't you, Bedelia? You're wise and clever enough to disappear after this without a word to anyone."

Bedelia's pupils grew wide, her eyelids quivering in a mixture of fear and sadness as she looked down at her plate before beginning to leisurely cut into the piece of meat on it. Gulping audibly, she lifted her eyes to look at Will and then Hannibal before spearing a piece of herself on her folk and bringing it to her mouth. She chewed slowly, a pained expression of defeat on her face. It was clear that she realized there would be no victory for her. Not in this lifetime and certainly not where Hannibal was concerned.

"My compliments to the chef," she said with a grimace before downing the rest of her wine.

After injecting Bedelia with a tranquilizer, Hannibal called upon Chiyoh to take her away. Will felt uneasy about seeing Chiyoh, especially given the circumstances. Her deeply enigmatic motivations in all things pertaining to Hannibal unsettled Will considerably, but he knew any argument he made regarding that subject would not be met with much kindness. Will didn't particularly want to get in a squabble about who Hannibal should and shouldn't trust this close to their departure, so he bit his tongue for the time being. Still, he had reservations about two women who had been wronged by both of them sharing a car ride to wherever Chiyoh decided to take Bedelia. Will was sure that once Bedelia was awake, the two of them would have many notes to compare.

Chiyoh was cordial and brief with Will, but the heat behind her eyes suggested that her thoughts held a heavy disdain for him.

"Since you will be leaving soon, I think I too will be retreating from this country for a while. I will not follow you, and I do not wish to know where you are headed for now." Chiyoh looked at Hannibal and gave Will only a fleeting glance.

"You should have a respite. For now, may you be as untethered as possible and as you never before have been." Hannibal smiled warmly and gave her upper arm a squeeze.

"I am sure we will find our paths crossing yet again, and I will not forget my promise to protect you."

"I know. I wish you all the best, Chiyoh."

Chiyoh nodded solemnly before turning to Will.

"William?"

Will looked up in surprise.

“Yes?”

“May I speak with you?”

Will looked cautiously at Hannibal. Hannibal gave him a nod of approval.

“Uh, sure. Okay.”

Chiyoh signaled for Will to follow her outside. Leaning side by side against the car, neither of them spoke for a moment. Will was still a little shocked that she had asked to talk to him privately and couldn’t begin to guess what she had to say.

“Do not let him consume you,” Chiyoh finally said, eyes gazing off into the woods around them.

“Do you mean that literally or figuratively? You have to be more specific when it comes to Hannibal,” Will quipped as he turned to look at her.

“I believe he does desire you as an equal, but his nature can only change so much. Be careful that he does not convince you otherwise at times when it is not the case. Do not forget yourself as you are, independent of him. Do not fall so far down the rabbit hole that you can no longer see the sun above.” Chiyoh flashed him a grave look.

“I…thank you, Chiyoh,” Will said with surprise. “I am…not without awareness about the fact that vigilance isn’t something I can ever totally abandon when it comes to Hannibal, but I appreciate the thought. I promise I know what it is I’m entering.”

“He smells weakness as a shark smells blood. Continue to fight him and be as willful as you always have been. He respects that from you. Do not forget that you are as strong as he is. He has endured you as much as you have endured him.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Will nodded thoughtfully. Unexpected as it was, he genuinely did appreciate her concern and advice. It occurred to Will that perhaps disquiet was what he had read on her face rather than contempt. Chiyoh knew the beast that resided within Hannibal. She knew what Will was getting himself into by being the only person to attempt a union with such a man.

Chiyoh nodded curtly before getting into her car, an unconscious Bedelia wrapped in a blanket in the back seat.

Will watched Chiyoh drive away before heading back inside where he found Hannibal clearing away the dishes from their eccentric feast. Hannibal smiled at Will as he entered but didn’t grill him about what had just happened.

“Aren’t you going to ask what that was all about?”

Hannibal tilted his head in amusement.

“No. I believe it was meant to be private, was it not?”

“Yeah, I believe it was.” Will smiled and walked over to put his arms around Hannibal’s waist as he stood at the sink rinsing off the dishes. “I love you,” he whispered into Hannibal’s neck, lips brushing against his skin.

“And I you, mon trésor.” Hannibal stretched a hand back to ruffle Will’s hair.

“What is that? French?” Will queried, kissing his way up Hannibal’s neck.

“Yes, ‘my treasure’ to be precise.” Hannibal grinned and twisted around in Will’s arms, bringing their lips together in a soft kiss.

“I’m sorry I don’t call you anything.” Will looked down rather sheepishly.

“I assure you that it’s hardly a prerequisite for being my companion, Will.” Hannibal lifted Will’s chin with a forefinger so they were eye to eye again.

“I know. I just…I want to sometimes, but it’s sort of like that first morning when I felt idiotic about wanting to put my arms around you. Everything sounds too childish or average or something. Nothing quite fits,” Will cast his eyes downward again as he spoke, “God, this is a stupid conversation. Who gives a fuck about pet names when we’re going to be on the eternal run from the law? Ignore me.”

Will sighed and buried his face in Hannibal’s chest, a gesture that was as much an effort to escape embarrassing eye contact as it was an attempt to be closer to his partner. Hannibal laughed, and Will felt the rumble from Hannibal’s chest reverberating on his cheek.

“One can give due consideration to a wide range of concerns without doing a disservice to those that are perhaps of a more pressing nature. Our brains hold the capacity to care for all things great and small within the same span of time. There is nothing stupid or trivial about this conversation. You wish to show me your love through terms of endearment as do I. It is a perfectly natural urge, and I do understand why you struggle with it. I would not imagine that you have been much for such things in the past, no?” Hannibal ran his hands up and down Will’s back as he smiled at Will’s awkwardness.

“Well, my *past* is pretty damn limited compared to most, but yeah. I haven’t exactly been the light-hearted, romantic type…Not until you anyway.” Will felt his cheeks blushing a deep red.

Not wanting to exacerbate Will’s self-consciousness, Hannibal didn’t comment on that. He couldn’t stop the wide smile from spreading across his lips though.

“Perhaps something in a foreign tongue would feel less strange to you? Its meaning concealed a little bit by not being in your native language?”

“Yeah, maybe. Any ideas?”

“Maybe something in my mother tongue might suffice? Brangusis or mylimasis? I think I would quite like hearing Lithuanian from your lips.” Hannibal kissed Will’s forehead and

smiled down at him.

“*Mylimasis*,” Will tried out the strange shape of the foreign word on his tongue, “It does sound less weird than anything else I’ve tried in my head which doesn’t really make any logical sense considering I don’t speak Lithuanian. What does it mean?”

“Beloved, sweetheart, darling, all interchangeable really. Whatever you most prefer to think of it as. And I would be happy to teach you more Lithuanian if you would like.

“I would. I want to know more about…that time. And after too. I want to know everything I can about you.” Will looked up a little shyly. He knew talking about the past was difficult for Hannibal, and the last time he had confided in Will, it hadn’t ended well to say the least.

“Anything you want to know, you are welcome to ask. Anything at all, Will.” Hannibal stroked Will’s cheek with a reassuring thumb.

Will just smiled. He knew Hannibal meant it with all his heart.

The remainder of the evening felt so strange to Will. Every moment was impregnated with what was to come, every movement he made felt like the fluid, delayed sensation of pushing one’s hand through water, watching it move through your spread fingers under the surface, the liquid’s resistance always stronger than anticipated. It was somehow dream-like while also being too real.

He chose to cope with this by clinging to Hannibal as much as he would allow (which was of course an infinite amount), latching onto his solid, commanding presence for proof that this was truly unfolding before him like the well-worn pages of some epic, ancient fairytale, dark and mystical, horrible and beautiful. Winston lingered nearby, sensing that Will was a little agitated and in need of comfort, nosing into Will’s outstretched hand and curling at his feet.

Neither of them spoke much, preferring instead to drink in each other’s meaningful looks and smiles. They hardly needed words to be truly heard by one another anymore.

After a couple glasses of wine by the fire, Will wordlessly led Hannibal by the hand up the stairs and into the bathroom. Since that first kiss in the shower, Will had wanted to relive the moment and do what he didn’t have the strength to at the time. Will reached into the spacious glass shower to turn on the water, testing the temperature with his hand as he turned the knobs to get it just right. Satisfied, he turned back to Hannibal who was leaning against the door frame, arms crossed as he wore a provocative smile. Will grinned back and started stepping out of his clothes piece by piece.

“Is there something you want, Will?” Hannibal raised his eyebrows, smile growing ever wider.

Now naked save for his underwear, Will stepped forward and wrapped his hand around Hannibal’s tie (although Will had changed into something less formal hours ago, Hannibal remained regal and gorgeous in his suit, shedding only the jacket), using the leverage to tug him forward into a rough kiss.

“I’m hoping you’ll fuck me in the shower like I wanted you to so badly after the first time I kissed you,” Will whispered, voice hoarse with want. “Especially now that we both have a clean bill of health and all.”

Hannibal let out a possessive growl as he shed his clothes, Will helping the process along as much as he could while fighting the urge to rip the garments from Hannibal’s body. Hannibal somehow folded his pants and waistcoat and laid them on the shelf of linens gracefully without breaking contact with Will, covering his face and neck with hungry kisses. Will stepped out of his boxers and chuckled as he looked at the clothes arranged neatly behind him

“Are you laughing at me, darling Will?”

“Yes. Only you could manage to fold your fucking clothes on the way to shower sex. Admit it, you’re grimacing inside every time we throw our clothes on the floor before we do this, aren’t you?” Will teased, nipping at Hannibal’s bottom lip.

“No.”

Will canted his head skeptically and waited for Hannibal to be honest.

“Fine…yes, it bothers me minutely, but it hardly matters enough to be noteworthy. I need you far more than I need to establish order and tidiness in my home. There is nothing I have ever needed in this life more than you.” Hannibal looked so vulnerable and genuine in that moment, his usually steady eyes darting back and forth ever so slightly as they scanned Will’s, voice hushed and almost plaintive. It didn’t particularly matter to Will if Hannibal had said it simply because he thought it was what Will wanted to hear, although he didn’t think that was the case. Hearing the very word *need* escape from Hannibal’s lips shook Will to the core. It wasn’t as though he didn’t already know it to be true, but Will doubted very, very much that anyone had ever heard Hannibal tell them he *needed* them. Not in any way. Not in a way meant to mimic average relationship dynamics to appease any of the partners he had effectively used as shields to prevent the outside world from growing suspicious, not in a way meant as a joking remark in passing, and certainly not in the candid, sweet way he had just told Will. Will considered making a joke about how this was tantamount to a proposal from someone as OCD and preoccupied with cleanliness as Hannibal, but he thought better of it. He sensed that Hannibal, for all his strength and self-possession, might be a bit like a frightened rabbit prone to fleeing from the slightest startle in moments like this. After all, fiercely proven commitment or not, Will was the first person he had been like this with.

“You know, I need you too. I can’t be without you again. *I can’t*, Hannibal.” Will leaned his forehead against Hannibal’s and cupped the side of his face, thumb brushing the stubble along his jawline.

“You will never have to endure that pain ever again. I promise you that, and you know that I always keep my promises,” Hannibal whispered as he backed Will toward the shower.

They got in and stood under the warm spray together just as they had that first night. It now seemed like months ago, as though a whole lifetime had passed since their arrival. And in a way, it had. They were both new people now, cracking the edges of their cocoons and emerging encased in glowing new skins shimmering in brilliant, blinding hues. Beautiful creations that stemmed from each other, a symbiotic ebb and flow wherein one couldn’t exist without the other. Will felt their influence on each other, saw it undulating in the air like mist, traveling back and forth between them until it was impossible to tell where it began. It wasn’t like it had been that day in the Uffizi. The blurring no longer felt like a loss of identity. In fact, it didn’t feel like a loss at all but rather a gain in the most cosmically significant sense. It was comforting to have his head filled as equally with Hannibal as it was with his own thoughts and emotions.

Bedelia had been right about one thing. They *were* reflections of each other but not in the way she meant. Neither had molded and shaped the other into his image. They had drawn out the best pieces of each other, coaxed out the parts of themselves that had long been hidden and buried with a finesse that no one else had managed. Some would perhaps say they brought out the best and worst in each other. Will would argue that those two things were one and the same, and that was just fine.

Facing each other with foreheads tilted together just as before, Will leaned in and licked the warm droplets of water from Hannibal’s lips, arms twined around his back as fingers slid across wet shoulder blades.

“Will…” Hannibal gasped. He sounded like all the wind had left his lungs in one rapid exhale, and he was struggling for air.

Will looked up at him and saw the face of a man who could hardly believe his luck.

“Are you alright, Hannibal?” Will pressed closer until he could feel Hannibal’s heart beating against his, the warmth of his skin radiating through him at every point of contact.

“It feels rather like a dream, doesn’t it? An illusory vision concocted from a shared fantasy, threatening to twist out of shape to reveal the unpleasant reality on the opposing side.” Hannibal ran his fingers through Will’s wet curls, looking at him like he was a mirage that might dissolve any second now.

“But it isn’t. I’m here. And *finally*,” Will laughed softly, “we’re leaving together. Tomorrow we do what we were meant to do that night in Baltimore.”

Hannibal didn’t speak. He only devoured Will’s mouth like he couldn’t leave any corner unexplored, pushing him against the green tile in the back of the shower. Lapping the moisture from Will’s neck, he ground his growing hardness against him, both of them groaning and panting with need now.

“Hannibal…please…”

Hannibal didn't make him say it this time. He just lifted Will up against tile, hooking his arms under his knees to bring Will's legs around his waist, and entered him slowly. It was languid and tender, so slow that Will had time to focus and feel every single nerve ending igniting at Hannibal's touch. Hannibal had taken his time before but there had still always been this sense of urgency between them fueled by a pent up desire so ferocious and pervasive that it felt like it would consume them both if not released immediately. That didn't take over this time. Hannibal continued to thrust into Will with no hurry, staring into his eyes like he couldn't quite believe that someone this magnificent existed. Will looked right back and thought about all the times he had averted his eyes in the past, wishing suddenly that he could rewind and return Hannibal's honey colored gaze every single time it had been offered to him. It seemed like such a waste to be looking anywhere other than into those lovely, gold flecked irises.

"You're mine," Will said with a whimper, knees squeezing Hannibal's sides and hips bucking back onto his cock as he matched Hannibal's gentle pace.

"Always and completely, dear Will."

They stayed like that until the steam built in a cloudy curtain around them, reinforcing the hallucinatory mood of the whole day. Will almost felt like he was floating, suspended in some misty plane in the sky that he never wanted to come down from. He felt weightless and complete and *loved*. Watching the water cascade off the elegant slopes of Hannibal's shoulders, an image flashed across his mind of Hannibal emerging from the ocean with Will cradled against his chest, freezing water falling in streams from his body just as it was now. Even then, he had managed to look more like *The Birth of Venus* to Will than a wounded man on the verge of collapse. He remembered thinking that he was grateful it was the last thing he would see, so certain had he been that he was on the edge of death.

Will clawed at Hannibal's shoulders, his whole body feeling feverish from the heat of the water and the climax boiling in his belly. Hannibal pushed Will's knees back, bending him almost in half as he fucked into him deeper. Will moaned, so overwhelmed at the intimacy of the way Hannibal was still looking into his eyes as he thrust into him, a hand reaching up to stroke the side of Will's face as he leaned in for a slow, passionate kiss that drew desperate keening sounds from Will's mouth. Hannibal murmured something in a language Will didn't recognize, his smoky voice pushing Will ever closer to the edge. He cried out as he came on his stomach, the heat from his release indistinguishable from the warmth of the steam surrounding them.

"Hannibal, I…" Will's pupils were blown wide in surprise and lust. "I didn't know…is that…"

"Yes, it's possible to come untouched. However, I will not pretend that I don't feel some sense of smug accomplishment at being able to produce such a reaction from you," Hannibal laughed, pulling Will closer as he picked up his pace. It was only a few moments later that Hannibal spilled inside of Will, his fingers gripping Will's hair at the root as he groaned into his ear, hot tongue flicking out to lick the moisture from Will's skin.

As they dried off and made their way to bed, Will didn't feel the usual drain of energy overtaking him. Instead, he felt almost manic, brain buzzing with anticipatory excitement like

a child lying awake in bed waiting for the morning to arrive and bring about the first day of school. He drummed his fingers on Hannibal's chest as he settled his head in the crook of his arm, legs twitching nervously underneath the covers.

"Have you suddenly come down with a case of early onset Parkinson's, Will?"

"Hmm?" Will raised his head to meet Hannibal's gaze and then promptly realized what Hannibal was referring to. "Oh, sorry."

"Nervous?"

"No…at least not in a bad way. More like I'm too excited to sleep even though I know I need energy for tomorrow."

Hannibal gently slid out from underneath Will and walked toward the closet. Pulling out two sweaters and two pairs of pants, he tossed one of each onto the bed by Will's feet.

"What are you doing?" Will looked at Hannibal quizzically.

"No time like the present, wouldn't you agree?" Hannibal smiled as he pulled the other sweater on over his head.

"Now?" Will grinned as Hannibal's meaning dawned on him.

"Why not? We have our course of action carefully plotted. There is nothing left to be done that would require our presence here, and the cover of night is often a better time to travel for many reasons of which I am sure you are wholly aware." Hannibal opened a drawer to retrieve two pairs of underwear, slipping into one before handing the other to Will.

They both finished getting dressed, grinning at each other like teenagers sneaking out in the middle of the night as they did so, and headed downstairs to gather everything they would need. After loading the car with supplies and putting Winston in the backseat, they went back into the house to double check for anything they might have forgotten. Will looked around the cabin and was overcome with the sense of vacancy one feels as they prepare to move from a much beloved house and are forced to view it in its empty, barren state before they depart. That feeling one experiences when every room has been drained of the personal objects and memories they once held to make ready for a new occupant who will use the space to shape it into something else, something that will now belong to them instead. Every square foot of space where Hannibal and Will had touched, argued, laughed, confessed, looked back at one another with eyes that saw and understood and loved, was pulsing with the imprints of those moments. Will knew their marks were invisibly carved in every surface, permeating every pore in every plank of wood, scenting the walls with everything they had shared here.

"We will make new memories in every place we reside. Your memory palace as well as my own will hold onto them with tenacious fingers, drafting replica images with eidetic accuracy that shall sustain us no matter the distance we traverse from the physical places that served as the backdrop for their formation. The vivid details in our minds are precious gifts that may never be taken from us by anyone. They are locked away in safety for all time," Hannibal

mused as though he had read his mind. He snaked an arm around Will's waist, resting his hand protectively on Will's hip.

"He was still too young to know that the heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and that thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden of the past.*" Will smiled and pressed up against Hannibal's side, draping his arm across Hannibal's stomach.

"Once more onto the breach, dear Will?" Hannibal smiled back at him.

"With you? Always, mylimasis." Will kissed Hannibal's lips, enjoying the smile that spread across them from hearing the affectionate foreign word tumbling out of Will's mouth.

Without so much as a glance backward, they closed the door and walked hand in hand into the night.

Chapter End Notes

I am orphaning all my Hannibal works, so I just wanted to add a link to the sequel so anyone waiting for certain events won't be in suspense: If the World Burned to Ash, Still We Would Remain

So when I started this, I had no idea what I planned for it. I just got inspired from the excellent material of the show and went with it. It had been soooo long since I had attempted any longform prose, and I have to say...I'm not so terrified of creating a work this size anymore. I had lost all confidence in myself when it came to ever being able to attempt a novel again. I'd been paralyzed in fear over it and had started A LOT of things over the years that would just fade out after 30 pages or so for no good reason. Writing this fic has totally reframed my view of what I can do on that front, and it was FUN the whole time! It wasn't stress. It didn't feel like a chore. It feels indescribably great to have that feeling back.

And all of this is due in no small part to all of you! So many of you have left comments that seriously will serve as motivation when I'm feeling that nagging sense of self-doubt for a long, long time into the future. I cannot begin to express what your support means to me. You've been so kind, and I will always treasure that. It's been really great to get to know a few of you through tumblr (here's the link to that again in case you want it) as well! I swear, this fandom is completely unmatched by any other in the quality of people within it! So much sweetness and support and talent. Y'all are lovely. :)

As promised, I'm not done with this pair. They shall live on to properly murder husband it elsewhere soon! I just wanted to split it up since the change of scenery and such seems like a logical point to do that. :) Once again, a million eternal thanks, and I hope you guys enjoy this one. I was quite nervous about making this chapter just right!

ETA: This "He was still too young to know that the heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and that thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden

of the past.*” is from Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel García Márquez. It's a good thing I don't have these guys making direct quotes very often because I always put the damn asterisk there and yet STILL forget to note the source down here!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!